



Physical Activity Tips

Children three years old and over are encouraged to engage in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) daily.^{23,20}

Moderate levels of physical activity are at intensities faster than a slow walk, but still allow children to talk easily.²¹ Vigorous levels of physical activity are at intensities like a fast walk, jog or run that get children “breathless” or breathing deeper and faster than during typical activities.²² Children who are “breathless” are exercising their heart and lungs along with the muscles in their arms and legs! They are getting stronger and burning calories, which allows their bodies to balance food intake with energy used to help them maintain a healthy body weight. Provided that children do not have health restrictions, being breathless during physical activity is healthful, safe and will not cause physical harm.^{13,22}

Encourage physical activity to be accumulated throughout the day for all children.

Children are encouraged to accumulate the recommended time spent in daily physical activity by engaging in doses of ten minutes or more of activity. These doses of activity do not need to be continuous to provide the necessary health benefits. Intermittent doses of activity are also beneficial and come in the form of bursts of some vigorous and moderate activity and brief rest periods.

Vary the levels of intensity based on the child's fitness level.

When participating in physical activity with children, watch them for signs of fatigue or frustration and be ready to change the activity to meet the needs of each individual child. Levels of intensity vary based on the physical fitness of the child. One child may only be slightly winded from running across the playground, while another child may be heavily winded from the same activity. If children are fatigued by physical activity, it is important to support and encourage them to have fun, re-direct them to a less intense or modified activity or help them finish the activity if appropriate.

Variety is important.

When participating in physical activity with children, be sure to include a variety of age-appropriate activities. Encourage preschool and school-age children to work together to adapt or invent games and activities with you. This will serve to keep their interest by preventing boredom and monotony of doing the same activity day in and day out. In addition, engaging in a variety of activities provides children with numerous opportunities to work different muscles.

Provide opportunities for adult- or child-led physical activity.

Physical activity can be adult or child-led; both are important. Adult-led (structured) physical activity tends to get children active at higher levels of intensity; whereas child-led free play (unstructured) physical activity allows children to explore their environments, be creative and use their imaginations.

Don't forget about the infants. They can also be physically active.

It is important for infants to have the opportunity to explore their environments, build strength and increase body awareness through tummy time. Supervised free play on their tummies in open and safe places encourages infants to explore, touch and feel the world around them.

Preschoolers: 3 through 5 years old



Recommended

120 minutes* or more of physical activity per 8 hour day with opportunities for moderate-to-vigorous physical activity.⁶³

- Inclusion of both structured and unstructured physical activity.⁷⁰

* This can be done in small doses of 10 minutes throughout the day

60–90 minutes of daily outdoor time in a safe setting supervised by an adult.⁶⁹

Free space, developmentally appropriate toys and equipment to encourage children to be physically active: tricycles, yoga mats, balls, rocking boats, hopscotch, hoops, etc.

It is important to encourage participation in physical activities that are appropriate for their age, that are fun, and that offer variety.

Limit

Limit total media time (TV/DVDs, computers, video games, smart phones) to 1–2 hours/day.

Because children are likely to get additional media time at home, limit exposure in child care to 30 minutes once a week.

Media should be educational, developmentally appropriate, supervised, and expressly permitted by parents.

Limit computer use to 15 minute increments except for children with special needs who require and consistently use assistive/adaptive computer technology.⁶⁹

Not Recommended

More than 60 minutes of sedentary activity at a time, except while sleeping.

Physical activity that is not developmentally appropriate. *Which includes but is not limited to:*

- Riding a 2-wheel bike
- Roller skating/blading
- Elimination games

Ways to support the recommendations⁷⁶

- Model enjoyment of physical activity by joining children in ball play, dancing, yoga, stepping, active games and other fitness activities.
- Build time in your schedule to include daily planned structured physical activity that supports age-appropriate motor skill development (jumping, skipping, hopping, etc.). The activity should be engaging, fun, and involve all children with minimal or no waiting.
- Plan various fun physical activities that are vigorous (get children “breathless” or breathing deeper and faster than during typical activities) for short doses of time (riding tricycles, dancing to music, navigating an obstacle course, playing tag, etc.).
- Play games that incorporate music, imitation and simple directions such as animal movements, follow the leader or dancing with scarves.
- Plan safe, engaging activities outdoors: hopscotch, tricycle motocross, freeze tag, parachute games, etc.
- Offer ramps, steps, low climbers and obstacle courses to build skills, strength, coordination, and confidence.
- Develop movement stations indoors or outdoors so children can practice developing skills: throwing, catching, kicking, balancing, changing direction, jumping, hopping, skipping, galloping, etc.
- Provide activities to encourage balance: standing on one foot or walking a balance beam line on the floor, or on different textured or uneven surfaces.
- Provide opportunities to jump and hop using mats, pillows, or lines on the floor.
- Encourage children to work together to create their own games.
- Help children recognize their own faster heart rate and deeper breathing when they are physically active.
- Share information about healthy habits with families through conversations, newsletters and events.

Physical Activity Resources

Early Care and Education Settings

(* indicates that resource is available for a fee)

A Guide to Creating Active Outdoor Play Spaces: <http://www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/ActivePlaySpaces/Texts/PlaySpacesGuide-HiRez.pdf>

*Animal Trackers**

A physical education program for children ages 3—6. Featuring over 60 activities spread out over 10 units and filled with colorful characters with tons of games, songs, and stories, children will learn to associate developing their motor skills and coordination with fun!

<http://www.healthy-start.com/preschool-teaching-aids/animal-trackers.html>

*Coordinated Approach to Child Health (CATCH) Early Childhood Program**

Modeled after the original coordinated school health program, this program is designed to nurture a love for physical activity, provide an introduction to classroom-based gardening and nutrition, and encourage healthy eating in children ages 3 through 5.

<http://www.catchinfo.org/pdf/cec%20flier.pdf>

*Choosy Kids**

Resources for developing healthy food choices and physical activity preferences in children. Features some free and some fee-based materials.

<http://www.choosykids.com/CK2/>

*Color Me Healthy**

A program developed to reach children ages four and five with fun, interactive learning opportunities on physical activity and healthy eating. Features some free and some fee-based materials.

<http://www.colormehealthy.com>

Eat Well Play Hard in Childcare Settings (EWPHCCS)

An intervention that provides nutrition and physical activity education to preschool children, their parents and child care staff. The curriculum focuses on improving the nutrition and physical activity behaviors of preschool children and their parents/caregivers and influencing food and activity practices in child care settings. Materials developed by the New York State Department of Health:

<http://www.health.state.ny.us/prevention/nutrition/cacfp/ewphccs.htm>

Growing, Moving, Learning Infant Toddler Toolkit

This toolkit includes developmentally appropriate activities that promote physical activities and healthy eating for infants and toddlers. It provides activities to do in the classroom, and at home, and encourages parents to write about their child's response to the activities. Activity exercises include ways to adapt and extend each activity. This development and production of this toolkit was a collaborative effort by Nemours and the Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood at the University of Delaware.

http://www.dieec.udel.edu/sites/dieec.udel.edu/files/pdfs/early_childhood_professionals/Infant%20Toddler%20Toolkit%20Complete%20Vols%201-2-3.pdf

Head Start Body Start

A website that provides links to tip sheets, and other physical activity resources for young children, their families and teachers: an easily accessible calendar of activities, physical activity experiences to plan for infants and toddlers and activities for preschool children. The site offers many additional links to resources to develop program, environments, and outdoor/nature opportunities; in addition there are links to webinars and online classes. Thoughtful materials for families are available in both Spanish and English. Provided by the National Center for Physical Development and Outdoor Play.

<http://www.aahperd.org/headstartbodystart/>