



Fitness for Families

Does My Child Get Enough Exercise?

Recent studies show that more and more kids in the United States are overweight. Children also become less active every year they get older. Half of all school children aren't getting the exercise needed to build healthy hearts and lungs and many cannot pass standard fitness tests.

How Much Does My Child Need?

Grade school children need to be active at least 60 minutes each day. (Getting more than an hour is good, too.) The activity doesn't have to be continuous. This can be a combination of many things such as running games at recess, team sports and active play. The activity should be right for their age and development. A variety of activities is best. Some of the daily activity should last at least 10 to 15 minutes at a time. Some activities can be easy and some can be hard.

Benefits of Being Active

- Fit kids are more likely to be fit as teens and adults.
- Increased confidence.
- Increased strength and coordination.
- Weight control.
- Decreased risk of diabetes and heart disease.

Where Do We Start?

Starting a family fitness program is great for your child's future. It's also a great way to spend time with your child. You don't have to start a strict exercise routine to become more active. Instead, make changes in your daily routine to include active play. Remember that your children see you as the model; they will do what you do. So, after dinner, instead of turning on the TV, play catch or take a walk with your children.

Try These Fun Ideas:

- Turn your backyard into a gym. Set up silly obstacle courses. Hold a leaf-raking contest.
- Get everyone to help with yard work, washing the car and cleaning the house.
- Have family play time one night a week. Kids and parents take turns choosing things the whole family can do. Some ideas are swimming, biking or playing tag in the yard.
- On rainy days, put on music and dance.
- Check out an exercise book, tape or video from the library. Some are made just for kids.

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Tips for Success:

- Stress fun, not skill.
- Provide opportunities for your children to learn lifetime sports like swimming and biking.
- Expose them to a variety of individual and team activities.
- Include your kids in planning.
- Keep a diary of physical activities to be sure 60 minutes is met each day.
- When gift giving, select presents that promote movement such as a bike and helmet or a Frisbee.
- Always use the right clothes and equipment for comfort and safety.
- Drink plenty of water while active.
- Include warm-ups and cool-downs as part of your workout.

Of Special Note

Find out how many days a week your kids have physical education (PE) at school. This can vary. Ask your children what they do at recess. If there isn't a time to be active at school, you may want to provide it at home.

Children with special needs can participate in physical activities too. They may require extra time and support. Offer support and be patient with overweight children. They may have trouble getting started on a fitness program. Talk with your health care provider to help you and your child get started.

For More Information

- Your health care provider
- Children's Resource Line:
(206) 987-2500 or 1-866-987-2500
toll-free Washington, Alaska, Montana, Idaho
- www.seattlechildrens.org
- The Presidents Council on Physical Fitness and Sports at:
www.fitness.gov/
- Age appropriate fitness tips
at Kids Health: www.kidshealth.org

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children's Hospital. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health care provider.

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