

Exercise and Children



Do you know how fit your kids are? If you take their word for it, you may not have the full story.

A Harvard School of Public Health study found that children think they get more exercise than they really do. Children ages 11 to 13 wore monitors that tracked their activity for eight days. Then that data was checked

against the kids' verbal reports. The result? Children said they were more active than they really were.

"Just because a child is busy doesn't mean he or she is getting enough aerobic exercise," says Gail E. Richards, MD, in the Division of Endocrinology at Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center. Aerobic activity involves steady movement and raises the heart rate, says Dr. Richards. She notes that lack of exercise and eating poorly can cause a child to be overweight, which is a risk factor for diabetes, heart disease and other health conditions. More than 40 percent of older children and adults are overweight. Being fit helps children grow strong bones and muscles, helps them sleep well at night and be alert during the day. Being fit can also improve your child's emotional well-being and improve self-esteem.

Here's what kids need

Children and teens need at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day. The 60 minutes do not need to be done all at one time. Children can break the activity into 10- to 15-minute segments. Moderate or higher-intensity activity counts, too, such as fast walking, playing tag, jumping rope or swimming, as long as it adds up to at least one hour a day.

What you can do

- Balance TV, computer and video game time with active time. Research has found that the more time kids spend in front of a screen, the less time they spend being active.
- Pick activities the whole family can do! Walk, sled, hike, play games, skate, bike, dance and jump rope.
- Plan outings that involve walking, like a trip to the park or zoo.
- Walk to school with your child. If it's too far to walk, drive to within a 15-minute walking distance, park the car and walk the rest of the way. Use the time to talk with your child.
- Be a role model by making time for exercise as a family or by yourself.

Aerobic and non-aerobic exercise

Many activities help children build muscles, speed, power, flexibility and teamwork skills — but they're not aerobic. Help your child choose both aerobic and non-aerobic activities to stay fit.

(Continued on back)

Aerobic and non-aerobic exercise, continued

Some samples of both kinds of exercise:

Aerobic

- Running
- Soccer
- Basketball
- Swimming
- Bicycling
- Tennis
- Martial arts

Non-aerobic

- Weightlifting
- Baseball
- Golf
- Diving
- Field events (e.g., high jump)
- Yoga



TO LEARN MORE

- Children's Resource Line (206) 987-2500 or (866) 987-2500 *toll-free Washington, Alaska, Montana, Idaho*
- Your Child's Health-Care Provider
- Resources on exercise and children:
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/exerciseforchildren.html
- For pre-teen and teen girls:
www.girlpower.gov/girlarea/bodywise/fitness/fitness.htm

Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Please call Marketing Communications at (206) 987-5205.

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.