

# Exercise and Children

## Do children and teens get enough exercise?

Recent studies show that only about one-third of American kids 6 and older get enough exercise each day. Many blame this on increased screen time, busy lifestyles and changes such as more traffic and less open spaces in which to play.

We also know that nearly one in three children in the United States are overweight and children also become less active every year they get older.

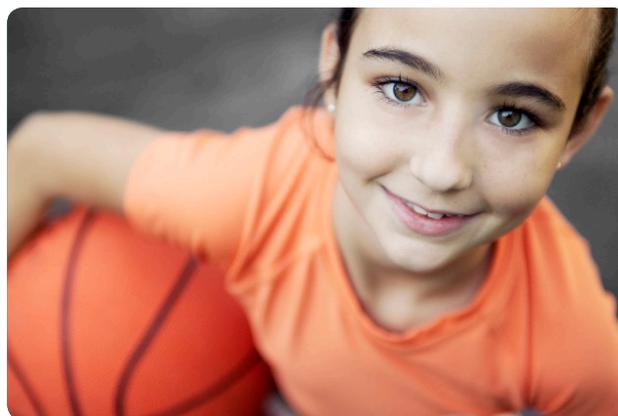
## How much exercise does my child need?

Preschoolers need lots of active play time. For this age, the goal is at least 3 hours (180 minutes) of active play each day. Your preschooler should play every hour throughout the day for about 15 minutes at a time.

Grade-school children and teens need to be active at least 60 minutes each day. Getting more than an hour is good, too. The 60 minutes do not have to be all at one time. It's OK to break the activity into 10- or 15-minute segments. A variety of activities is best. Help your child choose aerobic, muscle-strengthening and bone-strengthening activities that are right for their age and development.

Here are examples of the three kinds of exercise:

- **Aerobic exercise:** Running, bicycling, hiking, tag, jumping rope, martial arts, basketball, swimming, tennis, skateboarding, dancing, sweeping
- **Muscle-strengthening exercise:** Push-ups, sit-ups, rope climbing, swinging on monkey bars, tug-of-war, rock climbing, weight lifting, resistance exercises



- **Bone-strengthening exercise:** Hopping; skipping; jumping; running; sports such as basketball, tennis and volleyball

## What are the benefits of being active?

- Increased confidence.
- Increased strength and coordination.
- Active kids sleep better at night, are more alert during the day and perform better in school.
- Weight control and decreased risk of diabetes, heart disease and other health conditions.
- Kids and teens who are fit are more likely to be fit as adults.

## How can I help my child get more exercise?

Make changes in your daily routine to include exercise for your whole family. Remember that your children see you as the model; they will do what you do. Try these ideas:

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- 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.
- Instead of turning the TV on or sitting at the computer after dinner, play catch or take a walk together. Research has found that the more time kids spend in front of a screen, the less time they spend being active.
- Set up a silly obstacle course in your yard or at a nearby park.
- Hold a leaf-raking contest.
- Get everyone to help with cleaning the house, yard work and washing the car.
- Have family play time one night a week. Kids and parents can take turns choosing things the whole family can do. Some ideas are swimming, biking, dancing or playing tag in the yard.
- Plan outings that involve walking, like a trip to the park or zoo.
- When gift-giving, select presents that promote movement, such as a Frisbee or a bike and helmet.
- Check out an exercise book, tape or video from the library and get more ideas!

### Tips for success

- Stress fun, not skill.
- Always use the right clothes and equipment for safety and comfort.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after being active. Sports drinks aren't needed; plain water is best.
- Include warm-ups and cool-downs as part of your exercise.
- Include your kids in planning.
- For older kids, keep a diary of physical activities to be sure 60 minutes is met each day. Include time your child spends in PE and at recess.
- If you have a child with special needs, involve them in the activities, too. They may require extra time and support.
- If your child is overweight, be patient and offer support. Talk with your healthcare provider to help you and your child get started on a fitness program.
- Make small changes to increase activity, like taking the stairs and running errands on foot or by bicycle.

#### To Learn More

- **Talk with your child's healthcare provider or visit our Nutrition and Fitness pages at [www.seattlechildrens.org/safety-wellness/nutrition-fitness](http://www.seattlechildrens.org/safety-wellness/nutrition-fitness).**

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Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call Marketing Communications at 206-987-5205 or 206-987-2280 (TTY).

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

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