



Physical Activity

How much physically active play is necessary for children?

For children ages 6 and older, expert recommendations vary between 30-60 minutes a day, most days of the week, of active play. The President's Council on Physical Fitness recommends a full 60 minutes for children 6-18 years old.

Remember that physical activity involves: cardiovascular (activities that benefit the heart and lungs), flexibility (range of motion of muscles and joints) and muscular strength. All these are important, and should, in combination, make up the 30-60 minutes. Those 30-60 minutes can be broken up into shorter intervals. For children who are not use to being active, start slow and *build up* to 30-60 minutes.

Lack of physical activity can contribute to childhood obesity. In turn, childhood obesity can increase the risk of diabetes, heart disease and other health problems. There have also been indications that inactive children become inactive adults. This can contribute to the possibility of life-long health problems. Start early to prevent these risks!

Even if your child isn't obese, lack of physical activity has an impact. Regular physical activity increases general health (muscle, bone and joint development) and can also reduce feelings of depression and anxiety. Physical activity may also be related to increased capacity for learning.

What can you do?

Limit TV and computer time: This can help make sure your child gets enough time for active play. It's not just homework that should get done before watching TV; it's active play too. One of the reasons that screen time (TV and computers) contributes to the risk of obesity is simply that every minute spent watching the screen is a minute that is NOT spent moving. There is significant indication that the commercials children watch on TV and the Internet, which advertise unhealthy foods, affect a child's eating habits in a negative way. There is also research that indicates that children who eat while watching TV eat healthier foods and more of them.

Be a good role model: Developing healthy habits is a family activity. It's okay if physical activity is something *you* struggle with. Setting goals to be more physically active and pursuing and accomplishing those goals, teaches your children a valuable lesson.

Help your child find an activity that they enjoy: Some children like organized sports, and can get their 60 minutes of active play accomplished if they are on a sports team. But not all children enjoy team sports. And enjoyment is extremely important if we want our children to continue an activity.

Recess might not count: Just because there is recess at your child's school doesn't mean that you should assume your child is being physically active during recess. Many children don't like physical activity and instead of running around at recess they are more likely to play sedentary games.

This doesn't mean your children can't find something to do that they like.

You can try:

- Dancing to music
- Roller skating/ice skating/roller-blading
- Hopscotch
- Jump rope
- Sledding
- Riding a bike
- Chasing games like tag, or relay races
- Pulling weeds from the garden
- Sit-ups
- Push-ups
- Yoga
- Tai Chi

It is not a good idea to have your young child use exercise equipment that is designed for adults. Even if the equipment is small in size this can be very dangerous and is unnecessary. Your child can get enough exercise without using pricey machines.

There are fun, child-oriented exercise videos that you can purchase or rent. These can be helpful getting you and your child moving when the weather is bad and you need to be inside. Many public libraries keep DVDs and tapes on their shelves, so you can try before you buy!