

Encourage Your Child to Be Physically Active



Today's youth are less active and more overweight than any previous generation.

Did you know?

- Children on average spend nearly 3 hours a day watching TV.
- Only half of children and teens, aged 12 to 21, regularly exercise.
- Illinois is the only state that still mandates that physical education be offered in public schools.
- More than 15% of all school children are considered obese or overweight.
- Overweight teens have a 70% chance of becoming overweight or obese adults.
- Eighty-five percent of children diagnosed with type 2 diabetes are either overweight or obese.
- Sleep apnea occurs in approximately 7% of children who are obese.

Get the entire family moving

With participation in all types of physical activity declining dramatically as a child's age and grade in school increases, it is important that physical activity be a regular part of family life. Studies have shown that lifestyles learned as children are much more likely to stay with a person into adulthood. If sports and physical activities are a family priority, they will provide children and parents with a strong foundation for a lifetime of health.

The benefits of physical activity

While exercise is vital to the health and well-being of children, many of them either do not appreciate or fully understand the many emotional and physical health benefits of physical activity.

The benefits of physical activity include

Benefits to the body

- Builds and maintains healthy bones, muscles, and joints.
- Controls weight and body fat.
- Improves appearance.
- Increases muscle strength, endurance, and flexibility.
- Improves ability to fall asleep quickly and sleep well.
- Reduces the risk of diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease later in life.
- Builds and improves athletic skills.

Mental benefits

- Increases enthusiasm and optimism.
- Organized sports foster teamwork and friendship.
- Boosts self-esteem.
- Reduces anxiety, tension, and depression.

Getting started

Parents can play a key role in helping their child become more physically active.

Following are 11 ways to get started:

1. **Talk to your pediatrician.** Your pediatrician can help your child understand why physical activity is important. Your pediatrician also can suggest a sport or activity that is best for your child.
2. **Find a fun activity.** Help your child find a sport that she enjoys. The more she enjoys the activity, the more likely it is that she will continue. Get the entire family involved. It is a great way to spend time together.
3. **Choose an activity that is developmentally appropriate.** For example, a 7- or 8- year-old child is not ready for weight lifting or a 3-mile run, but soccer, bicycle riding, and swimming are all appropriate activities.
4. **Plan ahead.** Make sure your child has a convenient time and place to exercise.
5. **Provide a safe environment.** Make sure your child's equipment and chosen site for the sport or activity are safe. Make sure your child's clothing is comfortable and appropriate.
6. **Provide active toys.** Young children especially need easy access to balls, jump ropes, and other active toys.
7. **Be a model for your child.** Children who regularly see their parents enjoying sports and physical activity are more likely to do so themselves.
8. **Play with your child.** Help her learn a new sport.
9. **Turn off the TV.** Limit television watching and computer use. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than 1 to 2 hours of total screen time, including TV, videos, and computers and video games, each day. Use the free time for more physical activities.

- 10. Make time for exercise.** Some children are so overscheduled with homework, music lessons, and other planned activities that they do not have time for exercise.
- 11. Do not overdo it.** When your child is ready to start, remember to tell her to listen to her body. Exercise and physical activity should not hurt. If this occurs, your child should slow down or try a less vigorous activity. As with any activity, it is important not to overdo it. If your child's weight drops below an average, acceptable level, or if exercise starts to interfere with school or other activities, talk with your pediatrician.

Remember

There is a powerful relationship between childhood obesity and lifelong weight and related medical problems.

Exercise along with a balanced diet provides the foundation for a healthy, active life. One of the most important things parents can do is encourage healthy habits in their children early on in life. It is not too late to start. Ask your pediatrician about tools for healthy living today.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

American Academy
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 60,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.
American Academy of Pediatrics
Web site—www.aap.org

Copyright © 2003
American Academy of Pediatrics