

Family Guide To Physical Activity

Many of America's children are not active enough for healthy growth and development. Research suggests that a lack of physical activity is dangerous to their health and can be a major contributor to weight gain. By following the suggestions below, you can help make physical activity a part of your family's routine and create a pattern of healthful living that may stay with your kids for the rest of their lives.

NEW PHYSICAL ACTIVITY RECOMMENDATION FOR YOUTH

It is recommended that children and adolescents participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity most days of the week, preferably daily.¹ Children and adolescents can choose any type of moderate or higher intensity physical activity, such as brisk walking, playing tag, jumping rope or swimming, as long as it adds up to at least one hour a day. For children and adolescents, regular physical activity has beneficial effects on the following aspects of their health:

- Weight
- Muscular strength
- Cardiorespiratory (aerobic) fitness
- Bone mass (through weight-bearing physical activities)
- Blood pressure (for hypertensive youth)
- Anxiety and stress
- Self-esteem

Children and adolescents who are just beginning to be physically active should start out slowly and gradually build to higher levels in order to prevent the risk of injury or feelings of defeat caused by setting unrealistic goals. It is important that children and adolescents are encouraged to be physically active by doing things that interest them. This will help them establish an active lifestyle early on.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

As a parent, you play an important role in shaping your children's attitudes toward physical activity and behaviors. Here are some tips to encourage your children to be more physically active:

- Set a positive example by leading an active lifestyle yourself and make physical activity part of your family's daily routine, such as designating time for family walks or playing active games together.
- Provide opportunities for children to be active by playing with them. Give them active toys and equipment, and take them to places where they can be active.
- Offer positive reinforcement for the physical activities in which your child participates and encourage them as they express interest in new activities.
- Make physical activity fun. Fun activities can be anything the child enjoys—structured or non-structured—ranging from team sports to individual sports, and/or recreational activities such as walking, running, skating, bicycling, swimming, playground activities and free-time play.

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- Ensure that the activity is age appropriate and, to ensure safety, provide protective equipment such as helmets, wrist pads and knee pads.
- Find a convenient place to be active regularly.
- Limit the time your children watch television or play video games to no more than two hours per day. Instead, encourage your children to find fun activities, with family members or on their own, that involve more activity (walking, playing sports and games, dancing).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has parent brochures—in English, Chinese and Spanish—about increasing your children’s physical activity at www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/physicalactivity/brochures/index.htm. Additional CDC resources also are available, including recommendations and tools, materials for specific age groups and information specifically for girls. Go to www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/recommendations/young.htm.

¹This physical activity recommendation is from the *USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005*.