



BLEND Physical Activity Focus

Play Actively Everyday

“Add Physical Activity Into Your Preschooler’s Day”

Physical Activity for Young Children

Leading a physically active lifestyle is important for everyone. Physical activity is particularly vital for children’s health and development, and for establishing healthy behaviors that promote enjoyment of childhood and lifelong activity. Play is the best form of physical activity for children. Throughout their lives, young children need to be encouraged to be physically active, with activities ranging from structured to unstructured play.

Research has indicated that child care centers are a very strong predictor of preschool-aged children's physical activity levels, making this an important setting to help young children obtain physical activity that is appropriate for their health and development. During the early years of life, when rapid growth and development is occurring in all domains, it is possible to establish healthy lifestyle choices and lay the foundations for a child's physical activity patterns. It is important that during this time children are provided with experiences through which to develop positive attitudes towards healthy eating and physical activity (Birch, 1999; Temple & O'Connor, 2003b).

How Much Physical Activity?

Children should do 60 minutes or more of physical activity each day. Encourage children to participate in activities that are age-appropriate, enjoyable, and offer variety! Make sure the children are doing three types of physical activity: Aerobic, Muscle-Strengthening, and Bone-Strengthening.

Types of Physical Activity		
Aerobic	Muscle-Strengthening	Bone-Strengthening
<i>Most of the 60 or more minutes a day should be either moderate- or vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, and should include vigorous-intensity physical activity at least 3 days a week.</i>	<i>As part of their 60 or more minutes of daily physical activity, children and adolescents should include muscle-strengthening physical activity on at least 3 days of the week.</i>	<i>As part of their 60 or more minutes of daily physical activity, children and adolescents should include bone-strengthening physical activity on at least 3 days of the week.</i>

What Is Structured and Unstructured Play?

Structured and Unstructured Play refers to the different types of children’s play.

- **Structured Play** is usually organized and adult-led; it may have rules, time limits, and special equipment. Some examples include team sports, play groups, or swimming lessons.
- **Unstructured Play** is less restricted and is often ‘spontaneous’ (made up on the spot by those playing). Unstructured play can include playing alone or with friends and family, imaginative play, going for a walk, dancing to music at home, or playing in the park.

Why is Physical Activity Important?

Physical activity and active play are important for a child’s health, growth, and development. Regular activity and play have many benefits for your child beyond just maintaining a healthy weight and protection against diseases in later life. Physical activity...

- Helps children stay healthy.
- Helps children learn good habits early in life.
- Gives children an outlet for their natural energy.
- Builds strong hearts and bones.
- Strengthens muscles and develops good posture.
- Improves sleep.
- Develops movement skills.
- Improves concentration.
- Develops acceptable self-esteem and confidence.
- Improves physical skills.
- Provides opportunities to learn social skills in leading, explaining and following.

What Counts as Physical Activity

Type of Physical Activity	Young Children
Moderate-intensity aerobic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active recreation such as hiking, nature walks, scavenger hunts, flying a kite • Bicycle/tricycle riding, swinging on a swing set • Walking in a park, gardening, cleaning
Vigorous-intensity aerobic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active games involving running and chasing, such as tag • Bicycle riding • Jumping rope • Martial arts, such as karate • Running • Sports such as ice or field hockey, basketball, swimming, tennis, or gymnastics
Muscle-strengthening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Games such as tug of war, Frisbee toss, playing catch • Modified push-ups (with knees on the floor) • Resistance exercises using body weight or resistance bands, yoga • Rope or tree climbing • Sit-ups • Swinging on playground equipment/bars • Gymnastics
Bone-strengthening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Games such as hop-scotch • Hopping, skipping, jumping • Jumping rope • Running • Sports such as gymnastics, basketball, volleyball, tennis

Sedentary Lifestyle

A sedentary lifestyle, or inactive lifestyle, is time spent using minimal energy. The most common form of sedentary behavior in children involves “screens” and this behavior, or tendency, is often linked closely to obesity in children. “Screens” include:

- Television
- DVD players
- Console games (Xbox, Playstation)
- Computers
- Hand-held electronic games

Screen Time Recommendations for Preschoolers: Limit TV and screen time to *less than 2 hours* daily, as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

To learn more about **Physical Activity for Preschoolers** or the entire family, visit the USDA’s MyPyramid web site at:

www.mypyramid.gov/preschoolers/PhysicalActivity/howmuch.html

Additional information on Physical Activity can be found at:

www.aahperd.org/naspe/standards/nationalGuidelines/ActiveStart.cfm

www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/children.html

www.health.gov/paguidelines/guidelines/summary.aspx

Safety First!

- Always lead by example and use proper safety equipment (e.g., bicycle helmets).
- Play environment should be positive, safe, and supervised.

How Can You Help With Physical Activity?

It’s important to shape a child’s attitudes and behaviors toward physical activity early in life. Here are some ways you can support a child’s active future:

- Set a positive example by leading an active lifestyle everyday.
- Make physical activity part of a daily routine by taking walks or playing active games together.
- Give children equipment that encourages physical activity.
- Take young children to places where they can be active, such as public parks, community fields, and courts.
- Be positive about the physical activities in which a child participates and encourage them to be interested in new activities.
- Make physical activity fun!
- Support and praise a child’s activity efforts – not the result of the activity.
- Limit sedentary time. *After 60 minutes of inactivity (such as watching TV) have the children get up and do something active.*