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Did You Know?

Nearly 75% of American schoolchildren don't get enough physical activity. Are your children among them?

Most children should have at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity every day, according to the National Institutes of Health. Unfortunately, nearly 75% of American schoolchildren don't get enough physical activity. Since the 1970s, the percentage of children and adolescents who are overweight has more than doubled. About 13% of children and adolescents are now seriously overweight.

Exercise has many important benefits for children. Exercise:

- Helps children grow, learn, and build strong bones and muscles
- Provides energy and helps children sleep better
- Helps prevent many diseases, like diabetes and heart disease, later in life

Why aren't children active enough? Too many structured activities, and too much time in front of the TV and the computer are a big part of the problem.

Parents play a major role in how active their children are. Set a good example by exercising yourself—regularly. This lets your children know that exercise is important. Children need some exercise every day. Help your children find physical activities that they enjoy. For most children, a combination of free play and organized sports works best. But not all children like organized sports, or play all sports well.

Getting Started

Getting started is the hardest part of any exercise program. Start slowly and build up. Try these tips:

- Break the "daily quota" of exercise up into small chunks, for example, 10 minutes walking the dog in the morning, 30 minutes of bike riding after school, and 20 minutes of hide and seek after dinner
- Choose fun, year-round activities
- Warm up and cool down with walking, bending, and gentle stretching exercises to help avoid injuries
- Work toward fitness goals gradually

Picking the Right Activities

Choosing types of exercise that are right for your children depends in large part on their age. Most experts say that children under the age of 7 are too young for organized team sports. Good activities for young children include:


Learn More:

- » [The Children's Hospital at Cooper University Hospital](#)
- » [Designing a Program](#)
- » [Exercise Efficacy Testing: Evidence-Based Disease In](#)

- Hopscotch
- Tag
- Jump-rope
- Wiffleball
- Swimming
- Gymnastics

Good activities for children ages 7 and older include:

- Biking
- Baseball/softball
- Basketball
- Soccer
- Kickball
- Ice skating
- Gymnastics

General Exercise Tips

- Be a role model for your children
- Involve the whole family in physical activities like biking, hiking, or swimming
- Encourage your children to be active everyday
- Make exercise fun
- In organized sports, don't emphasize winning
- Use physical activity, such as a trip to a farm to pick apples, as a reward
- Schedule physical activities in 10- to 15-minute blocks of time throughout the day
- Designate indoor areas for physical activity
- Buy your children toys and gifts geared toward physical activity

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