

Why is physical activity important?

Children between 5 and 12 years of age greatly benefit from being physically active. It can:

- * Promote healthy growth and development.
- * Build strong bones and muscles.
- * Improve balance and develop skills.
- * Maintain and develop flexibility.
- * Help achieve and maintain a healthy weight.
- * Improve cardiovascular fitness.
- * Help relaxation.
- * Improve posture.
- * Provide opportunities to make friends.
- * Improve self-esteem.

How much is enough?

Kids need to do a minimum of 60 minutes of physical activity every day. But remember, more is better – even up to several hours! This can be built up throughout the day with a combination of moderate to vigorous activities.



For more information

www.healthyactive.gov.au

Other resources that you may find useful include:

Everyone wants to be more active. The problem is getting started.

Australia's Physical Activity Recommendations for 12-18 year olds

National Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults

Food for Health, Australian Dietary Guidelines for Adults, Children and Adolescents

Australian Guide to Healthy Eating

Each of these can be obtained by calling 1800 020 103 and asking for the PHD publications request line.

GET HEALTHY. GET ACTIVE.

Building a healthy, active Australia.



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Department of Health and Ageing (2004) Australia's Physical Activity Recommendations for 5-12 year olds, Canberra.

Active kids are healthy kids.

AUSTRALIA'S PHYSICAL ACTIVITY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 5-12 YEAR OLDS.



Active and healthy.

Kids love to be active. Making physical activity a part of their daily routine is not only fun, but also healthy.

Physical activity is important for healthy growth and development. It is also a great way for kids to make friends and learn physical and social skills.

Encouraging kids to be active when they are young also establishes a routine that could stay with them throughout their life.

If you are a parent or carer of a young child, the two points to remember are:

- * Children need at least 60 minutes (and up to several hours) of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day.

- * Children should not spend more than two hours a day using electronic media for entertainment (e.g. computer games, TV, Internet), particularly during daylight hours.



What type of activity is recommended?

A combination of moderate and vigorous activities is recommended.

A moderate activity will be about equal in intensity to a brisk walk, and could include a whole range of activities such as a bike ride or any sort of active play.

More vigorous activities will make kids “huff and puff” and include organised sports such as football and netball, as well as activities such as ballet, running and swimming laps. Children typically accumulate activity in intermittent bursts ranging from a few seconds to several minutes, so any sort of active play will usually include some vigorous activity.

Most importantly, kids need the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities that are fun and suit their interests, skills and abilities. Variety will also offer your child a range of health benefits, experiences and challenges.

Remember, any activity that sees your child expend energy is good!



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What about skill learning?

Kids gain valuable experience and can learn skills such as running, throwing, jumping, catching and kicking, by participating in a variety of physical activities. Active play and informal games, as well as organised sport, provide opportunities to develop these skills, which help to build their confidence and gives them more options to take part in a wide range of activities as they get older.

Cycling and walking on neighbourhood streets and paths also provide kids with skills that make them more street-smart and aware of their surroundings. Swimming is another activity that is not only healthy, but will teach kids about safety when they are at the beach or the pool.

What about TV and computer games?

Television viewing of more than two hours a day in childhood and adolescence is associated with poor fitness, smoking, raised cholesterol and being overweight in adulthood.

If they get the chance, kids may often choose surfing the net, watching TV and playing computer games over other activities. And while these activities can be educational they involve sitting still, often for long periods of time.

Ideally, your child shouldn't spend more than two hours a day doing these things, particularly at times when they could be enjoying more active pursuits.

Pre-schoolers should be encouraged to take part in active play and their exposure to TV and video limited.

What about inactive children?

Kids who are inactive need to be encouraged. Perhaps organised sport is not their thing. That's fine. Talk to them and find out what is and see if there is something you can do together.

If your child is just starting to get active, begin with moderate intensity activity - say 30 minutes a day - and steadily increase.

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What about pre-school children?

Physical activity is important for all children, and infants and toddlers should be given plenty of opportunity to move throughout the day. Children should not be inactive for prolonged periods, except when they're asleep!

Daily movement helps to develop a child's sensory and motor systems. It helps them gain an understanding of the surrounding world and become confident moving within it.

In a space that is safe and hazard-free, let infants spend time lying on their front, back and sides; let them roll over, creep and crawl. And give pre-school children plenty of chances to enjoy active play.

Try to limit the time your child is inactive and encourage their natural instinct to move.

Take time to have fun playing with your child and enjoy watching them develop.

How can I help?

We can all play a vital role in supporting and encouraging kids to be active and healthy.

By offering kids a range of physical activities, you can help them develop an active approach to life that may stay with them for the rest of their lives.

And don't forget that along with plenty of activity, children also need good foods for healthy growth and development. Children need the goodness that comes from eating a wide variety of nutritious foods as outlined in the *Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia* and the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating*.



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What can I do now?

- * Be a role model - be active when you're with children.
- * Include physical activity in family outings.
- * Support active play, recreation and participation in sport.
- * Encourage and support walking and cycling to school.
- * Think of active alternatives when you hear "I'm bored".
- * Be prepared - have a box at home and in the car with balls, a frisbee or a kite etc, and you will be always ready for action.
- * Encourage children to replace time spent surfing the net, watching TV and playing computer games with more active pursuits.
- * Negotiate a limit on time spent surfing the net, watching TV and playing computer games.
- * Work with your child's school to increase physical activity opportunities.
- * Work with Local Government to support walking, cycling and physical activity in your neighbourhood and community.
- * Walk and talk - practice spelling, multiplication or other homework with your child while walking.
- * Give gifts or toys that promote physical activity such as bats, balls, skipping ropes, skates or bikes.

Adapted from Shilton TR & Naughton G. "Children and physical activity. A statement of importance and call to action." National Heart Foundation of Australia, April 2001.



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