

Physical Fitness

Regular physical activity for children improves strength, builds lean muscle, and decreases body fat. It also builds stronger bones that last a lifetime. Your child's physical well-being also affects him/her emotionally and mentally. Physical activity can improve your child's mood, reduce stress and depression, and increase self-esteem. You must acknowledge your role in your child's understanding of physical activity and healthy growth. You can help your child maintain a physically active lifestyle by providing encouragement and opportunities for physical activity. Families can plan outings and events that allow and encourage everyone in the family to be active. In this section, information is provided on the importance of physical activity in childhood. Suggestions on how to promote physical activity for the whole family and ideas on how to increase physical education at your child's school are also available.

Physical Fitness is beneficial to the mind and body. At an early age, children should be active and involved in fun and challenging activities. Better yet, participate in exercises with your children whenever possible.

ACTIVITY #1: " Warm Up"

Use two sticks of licorice to help your child learn the importance of warming up before exercise and physical activity. One stick of licorice should be frozen, the other, at room temperature. Tell your child that the licorice represents their muscles. First, have your child touch the two sticks, feeling that one is cold and the other is not. Tell your child to try to twist and bend the licorice that is at room temperature. This should be fairly easy. Then have your child try to do the same with the frozen licorice. This may be harder to do, and the stick of licorice may even break in pieces. Explain to your child that by gradually doing exercises during warm up, blood flows to muscles. This warms them up and gets them ready for more demanding activities. Warming up before physical activity and exercise can prevent your child from getting hurt or injured.

ACTIVITY #2: "Deep Breather"

Stand tall with knees bent. Rise on the toes and slowly circle arms inward and upward until the arms are straight overhead. Inhale deeply. Circle the arms backward and downward while lowering the heels and exhaling. Repeat five times.

ACTIVITY #3: "Swinging March"

Stand up straight with feet wide apart, hands at sides. Alternate right and left arms in forward circular movements. At the same time, lift the opposite knee so that when the right arm is raised, the left knee is raised, and vice versa. Repeat ten times, then try to raise arms going backwards, like the backstroke.

ACTIVITY #4: "Bird Jumps"

This is a jump rope activity that will allow your child to be physically active. Tell your child to jump rope with his toes pointing inward. Then have your child jump the rope with his toes pointing outward. Have your child alternating between toes pointing in and out.

Tips and Information

Regular Activity in Childhood and Adolescence...

- Improves blood pressure and cholesterol levels.
- Promotes a healthy heart.
- Increases self-esteem.
- Helps control stress.
- Reduces feelings of anxiety and depression.
- Helps control weight.
- Helps build strong and healthy bones and muscles.
- Increases energy level and improves strength and endurance.
- Reduces risk of developing colon cancer and coronary heart disease.

Possible Physical Activities Include...

- dance
- basketball
- volleyball
- racquetball
- tennis
- bowling
- snowboarding
- frisbee
- jump rope
- jogging, running
- stretching
- swimming
- biking
- ice skate, roller skate
- walking
- active household chores
- 'playing' actively in park, on jungle gym, in water sprinkler, etc.
- hopscotch, pogostick
- tug- of - war

TIPS FOR RUNNING, WALKING, RIDING

1. Wear running shoes with proper cushioning and support.
2. Wear comfortable clothes.
3. Drink plenty of water. Wait to do activities after a heavy meal.
4. Choose a safe route that is well lit and not deserted.
5. Run in adequate weather conditions.
6. Let others know where you plan on doing any of these activities.
7. Know your limit and don't over do it!
8. Be organized and plan a schedule.
9. Warm up before stretching.
10. Let your muscles recuperate. Cool down!

Places or Settings in Which Your Child Can Engage in Physical Activity or Exercise

- home
- school
- playground
- public parks
- recreation centers
- private clubs
- sports facilities
- bicycling/ jogging trails
- summer camps
- dance centers
- religious facilities

10 Recommendations from The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

People begin to acquire and establish patterns of health related behaviors during their childhood, thus you should encourage your child to participate in physical activity. It is also very important that you get involved with your child's school in order to promote physical activity as a part of the school curricula.

1. **Policy:** Establish policies that promote enjoyable, lifelong physical activity.
2. **Environment:** Provide physical and social environments that encourage and enable safe and enjoyable physical activity.
3. **Physical Education:** Implement physical education curricula and instruction that emphasize participation in physical activity.
4. **Health Education:** Implement health education curricula and instruction that will help your child develop the knowledge and behavioral skills needed to maintain a physically active lifestyle.
5. **Extracurricular Activities:** Provide extracurricular physical activities that meet the needs and interest of your child.
6. **Parental Involvement:** Include parents and guardians, like yourself, in physical activity instruction and extracurricular programs. Encourage parents to support their child's participation in physical activity.
7. **Personnel Training:** Provide training for all school personnel that imparts knowledge and skills need to effectively promote physical activity.
8. **Health Services:** Assesses physical activity patterns among children, counsel them about physical activity, and advocate for physical activity programs and instruction.
9. **Community Programs:** Provide a range of developmentally appropriate community sports and recreation programs that will be attractive to the children.
10. **Evaluation:** Regularly evaluate the school and community physical activity instruction, programs and facilities.

Adapted from CDC's Guidelines for School and Community Programs to Promote Lifelong Physical Activity Among Young People.

What Can You Do?

Your involvement and participation in your child's physical activity instruction is essential to the development of a healthy and positive environment that promotes physical activity.

- 1) Encourage and support your child to participate in enjoyable physical activities.
- 2) Help your child develop his/her physical activity-related knowledge, attitudes, motor skills, behavioral skills, and confidence.
- 3) Advocate for comprehensive, daily physical education in your child's school and for programs that promote lifelong physical activity for your child.
- 4) Advocate for safe spaces and facilities that provide your child with opportunities to engage in many types of physical activity.
- 5) Make sure that your child participates in physical education classes, extracurricular physical activity programs, and community sports and recreation programs that he/she will enjoy.
- 6) Learn what your child likes to do so that you may assist them in finding appropriate physical activity programs and opportunities.
- 7) Be a physically active role- model and plan and participate in family activities that include physical activity.
- 8) Encourage your child to be active with his/her peers. Try to avoid sedentary activities such as playing video games and watching television.

Did You Know?

The Surgeon General's report on physical activity and health emphasizes that regular participation in moderate physical activity is an essential component of a healthy lifestyle. Children are more physically active than adults, but physical activity declines in adolescence. Many young people today do not engage in recommended levels of physical activity.

If you show your child support and encouragement, he/she is more likely to maintain a healthy and physical active lifestyle. Physical activity is positively associated with the support of friends, family, and peers. Advocate a positive perception of physical activity for your child. Let your child know about the benefits of physical activity, including learning lifelong skills, increasing strength, endurance, and flexibility, staying in shape, looking good, and just simply having fun!

Resources

American Fitness Alliance

www.americanfitness.net

American Council of Exercise

www.acefitness.org

American Heart Association

www.americanheart.org

Center for Disease Control, Division of Adolescent and School Health

www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash

The Fitness Fever Program

www.fitnessfever.com