



Kids and Exercise

When most adults think about exercise, they imagine working out in the gym, running on a treadmill, or lifting weights.

But for kids, exercise means playing and being physically active. Kids exercise when they have gym class at school, during recess, at dance class or soccer practice, while riding bikes, or when playing tag.

The Many Benefits of Exercise

Everyone can benefit from regular exercise. Active kids will have:

- stronger muscles and bones
- leaner bodies
- less risk of becoming overweight
- a lower chance of getting type 2 diabetes
- lower blood pressure and blood cholesterol levels
- a better outlook on life

Besides enjoying the health benefits of regular exercise, fit kids sleep better. They're also better able to handle physical and emotional challenges — from running to catch a bus to studying for a test.

The Three Elements of Fitness

If you've ever watched kids on a playground, you've seen the three elements of fitness in action when they:

1. run away from the kid who's "it" (**endurance**)
2. cross the monkey bars (**strength**)
3. bend down to tie their shoes (**flexibility**)

Parents should encourage their kids to do a variety of activities so that they can work on all three elements.

Endurance develops when kids regularly get aerobic activity. During aerobic exercise, large muscles are moving, the heart beats faster, and a person breathes harder. Aerobic activity strengthens the heart and improves the body's ability to deliver oxygen to all its cells.

Aerobic exercise can be fun for both adults *and* kids. Aerobic activities include:

- basketball
- bicycling
- ice skating
- inline skating
- soccer
- swimming
- tennis
- walking
- jogging
- running

Improving **strength** doesn't have to mean lifting weights. Instead, kids can do push-ups, stomach crunches, pull-ups, and other exercises to help tone and strengthen muscles. They also improve their strength when they climb, do a handstand, or wrestle.

Stretching exercises help improve **flexibility**, allowing muscles and joints to bend and move easily through their full range of motion. Kids get chances every day to stretch when they reach for a toy, practice a split, or do a cartwheel.

The Sedentary Problem

Kids and teens are sitting around a lot more than they used to. They spend hours every day in front of a screen (TVs, smartphones, tablets, and other devices) looking at a variety of media (TV shows, videos, movies, games). Too much

screen time and not enough physical activity add to the problem of childhood obesity.

One of the best ways to get kids to be more active is to limit the amount of time spent in sedentary activities, especially watching TV or other screens. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that parents:

- Put limits on the time spent using media, which includes TV, social media, and video games. Media should not take the place of getting enough sleep and being active.
- Limit screen time to 1 hour a day or less for children 2 to 5 years old.
- Discourage any screen time, except video-chatting, for kids younger than 18 months.
- Choose high-quality programming and watch it with your kids to help them understand what they're seeing.
- Keep TVs, computers, and video games out of children's bedrooms.
- Turn off screens during mealtimes.

How Much Exercise Is Enough?

Parents should make sure that their kids get enough exercise. So, how much is enough? Kids and teens should get 60 minutes or more of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily.

Toddlers and preschool children should play actively several times a day. Toddlers should get at least 60 minutes active play every day and preschoolers should have at least 120 minutes active play every day. This time should include planned, adult-led physical activity and unstructured active free play.

Young children should not be inactive for long periods of time — no more than 1 hour unless they're sleeping. And school-age children should not be inactive for periods longer than 2 hours.

Raising Fit Kids

Combining regular physical activity with a healthy diet is the key to a healthy lifestyle.

Here are some tips for raising fit kids:

- Help your kids do in a variety of age-appropriate activities.
- Set a regular schedule for physical activity.
- Make being active a part of daily life, like taking the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Embrace a healthier lifestyle yourself, so you'll be a positive role model for your family.
- Be active together as a family.
- Keep it fun, so your kids will come back for more.

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