

HEALTHY WEIGHT



Get Up! Get Busy! Get Healthy!

“If exercise could be packaged into a pill, it would be the single most widely prescribed and beneficial medicine in the nation.” — Robert Butler, M.D.

Does exercise really have a big effect on weight and health?

Most experts agree that the childhood obesity crisis has been caused as much by children's lack of physical activity as it has by their poor diets. The benefits of regular exercise are widely known and include:

- ▶ increasing muscle and bone strength,
- ▶ increasing lean muscle and decreasing body fat
- ▶ helping maintain healthy weight, and
- ▶ improving psychological well-being by reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as improving overall mood.

Furthermore, as children grow into adulthood, exercise also helps prevent chronic diseases by:

- ▶ reducing risk of heart disease and stroke,
- ▶ reducing risk of diabetes and improving control of blood sugar levels,
- ▶ reducing blood pressure in people who have high blood pressure and reducing the risk of high blood pressure in other people,
- ▶ increasing good cholesterol levels and reducing overall blood cholesterol, and
- ▶ reducing risk for some cancers.

Do children today exercise less than in previous generations?

Many children have become sedentary, meaning they rarely engage in recommended amounts of physical activity. Numerous studies have outlined the reasons why many children today are less active than in past generations. The most significant barriers to good exercise include:

- ▶ **Electronic Media:** Children now spend an average of 5 1/2 hours each day in front of TVs, computers and video games, more time than they spend doing anything else besides sleeping.
- ▶ **Less P.E. at School:** Many schools have drastically cut daily physical education classes.
- ▶ **Declining After-School Activity:** Some 62 percent of children do not spend any time after school in organized physical activities.
- ▶ **Driving:** Many children are driven almost everywhere they go, so few walk or ride bikes to school or to other activities.



60



minutes a day!



What is a healthy level of exercise for children? For elementary school children, the National Association for Sports and Physical Education recommends:

- ▶ All children should have at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day appropriate to their age and level of development. More than 60 minutes a day is encouraged, and up to several hours a day is fine.
- ▶ Some of a child's activity each day should be moderate to vigorous in intensity (See p.3).

For adolescents, The International Consensus Conference on Physical Activity Guidelines recommend:

- ▶ All adolescents should be physically active for at least 60 minutes every day as part of daily activities—playing, sports, or planned exercise.
- ▶ All adolescents should be vigorously active for at least 20 minutes at least 3 times a week.

Age-appropriate Activity

Children of all ages benefit from daily physical activity. Parents can set an example for children by maintaining an active lifestyle and encouraging kids of all ages to participate in activities that help them get up, get out and get healthy!

Babies

Babies are growing rapidly and developing the muscle mass that will allow them to stand and walk.

- ▶ Play with your baby and allow them to safely explore a stimulating environment.
- ▶ Pediatricians caution against walkers because of high injury rates.

Young Children

In young children, physical, cognitive, social and emotional development is closely linked. Physical activity contributes to overall growth and development. As children reach age 3 and 4, basic motor skills and movement patterns develop.

- ▶ Encourage activity that develops the fundamental motor skills that will last a lifetime.

- ▶ Give young children space and time to safely run, walk, gallop, jump, hop, skip, throw, catch, strike and kick.
- ▶ Show your enthusiasm for physical activity through special outings to the park, to a pool, or on a hike—no special equipment or skills needed.
- ▶ Take a child to a park or playground and use toys that encourage active play.
- ▶ Engage your toddler to “help” you walk the dog, wash the car, or rake leaves.

School age children

School age children are physically growing at a slow and steady rate, but during this same time their social, cognitive and emotional development is taking huge leaps. By this time, children have acquired most fundamental motor skills through play and they now want to refine these skills.

- ▶ Encourage participation in organized entry-level sports, joining in the neighborhood pick-up game, or being included in family games catch or soccer.

What's the difference between moderate and vigorous activity?

The simplest way to tell the intensity of exercise is the Talk Test. If an activity is light intensity, you should be able to sing while doing it. If something is of

moderate activity, you should be able to carry on a normal conversation. If you become winded or out of breath while you're doing something, then you know the activity is vigorous.

Light intensity

- ▶▶ Normal walking
- ▶▶ Doing household chores like dusting and vacuuming
- ▶▶ Stretching, warm ups
- ▶▶ Swimming, slow treading
- ▶▶ Golf with powered cart
- ▶▶ Gardening or pruning

Moderate intensity

- ▶▶ Brisk walking
- ▶▶ Bicycling 5 to 9 mph on flat terrain
- ▶▶ Gymnastics
- ▶▶ Shooting baskets
- ▶▶ Ballet
- ▶▶ Softball

Vigorous intensity

- ▶▶ Jogging, running
- ▶▶ Swimming laps
- ▶▶ Jumping rope
- ▶▶ Karate, judo
- ▶▶ Doing jumping jacks
- ▶▶ Soccer, football or basketball game

- ▶▶ Help improve your child's eye-hand coordination and balance with activities like throwing for distance and accuracy.
- ▶▶ Include children in family biking, hiking, swimming, basketball, soccer, baseball and any other physical activities of interest.
- ▶▶ Experts recommend that elementary school-aged children get at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day. Several hours of physical activity a day is fine.

Teens

Adolescents grow rapidly in both height and strength, but the exact age at which teens experience their growth spurts varies with each child (although it generally occurs a bit earlier with girls than boys). During these years, most teens experience some frustration along the way with how their bodies look. Physical activity helps keep energy levels up, improves mood, and helps keep body weight in a healthy range.

- ▶▶ Continue to encourage participation in competitive sports if a teen has been engaged in sports at younger ages.

- ▶▶ Help your teen identify an activity they like if they are not interested in organized sports. Biking, running, dancing or walking can be good choices for non competitive teens.
- ▶▶ Monitor your teen's weekly activity level, as only about 2/3 of young men and half of young women get the amount of moderate activity that is recommended for them.
- ▶▶ Discourage formal strength training (weight lifting) until children are fairly physically mature, high school age or older.
- ▶▶ Reassure teens as they approach sexual maturity that an increase in body fat is normal and that, with good nutrition and adequate exercise, they will grow taller and leaner. Concerns about body image can lead to unsafe weight loss or eating disorders, so pay attention to what your adolescent is eating and his or her activities. If you are concerned about your child's weight, take him/her to see a healthcare professional (See *What if My Child Seems Overweight* fact sheet).
- ▶▶ Experts recommend that teens are physically active every day and are vigorously active at least 3 days a week for 20 minutes at a time. Recommendations for adults are the same.

What can I do to help my child become more active? If you want an active child, be an active parent. That doesn't mean everyone has to go to the gym for an hour every day. Regular exercise can come from a number of activities including organized sports. Participating in sports promotes physical fitness and social development. It teaches taking turns, following directions, performing under pressure, accepting defeat, enjoying success and getting along with other children and adults.



All children should be physically active, but some may not be interested in playing sports. The following suggestions can help you engage your family in more activity. Additional ideas can be found at www.bam.gov/fit4life/misfit.asp.

- » Take a walk while reviewing spelling words, states and capitals or math facts.
- » Have children help walk the dog, pull weeds, wash the car, carry the laundry and do other active tasks at home.
- » Make space at home for active play.
- » Always keep balls, Frisbees, jump ropes and other fun gear in the car for a quick activity break.
- » Race, play tag, capture the flag, have jumping contests.
- » Dance.
- » Plan hikes, bike rides and other activities for family outings.
- » Take one child to the playground while another one has a sports practice.
- » Walk up steps.
- » Play hop-scotch or jump rope.
- » Learn about opportunities in the community— look for family times at the YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, local skating rinks, and swimming pools.



The Business Group's tool kit, *Reducing Child and Adolescent Obesity*, is made possible by support from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the Health Resources and Services Administration, Health and Human Services. Read all of the fact sheets in this series to learn about the many ways overweight can be prevented and treated. The series is available at www.businessgrouphealth.org/prevention/et_childobesity.cfm