

Why is exercise or physical activity important?

Physical activity produces overall physical, psychological and social benefits. Inactive children are likely to become inactive adults. And physical activity helps with:

- Building endurance and becoming stronger
- Strengthening the cardiovascular system
- Increasing energy
- Controlling weight, reducing obesity
- Reducing blood pressure
- Raising HDL ("good") cholesterol
- Reducing the risk of diabetes and some kinds of cancer
- Improved psychological well-being, including gaining more self-confidence and higher self-esteem

How can you promote physical activity among kids?

- Physical activity should be increased by reducing sedentary time (e.g., watching television, playing computer video games or talking on the phone).
- Physical activity should be fun!
- Parents should be role models
- Provide children with opportunities for increased physical activity
- Strive to find different activities that a child will enjoy and look forward to doing

How much exercise do children need?

- The American Heart Association recommends all children age 2 and older participate in at least 30 minutes of enjoyable, moderate-intensity physical activities every day that are developmentally appropriate and varied.
- If children don't have a full 30-minute activity break each day, try to provide at least two 15-minute periods or three 10-minute periods in which they can engage in vigorous activities appropriate to their age, gender and stage of physical and emotional development.

FUN WAYS FOR KIDS TO EXERCISE

SCAVENGER HUNT



Create a scavenger hunt for your child so they have to find each item on the list in the order it's written. Walk around with your child, and have him or her check off each object as he discovers it.

HULA HOOP



A hula hoop is a versatile piece of equipment. Besides standard hula hooping, the hula hoop can be spun from the neck, arm or leg. If the hula hoop is large enough, it can be used as a jump rope. This helps eye-hand coordination and large motor skills.

KICK BALL



Get a soccer-type ball and give one to each kid. Have the kids run laps around a play field, kicking the ball in front of them or have them kick one ball back and forth to each other.

THE GREAT OUTDOORS



Take advantage of outdoor excitement, no matter what the weather. Snowball fights, shoveling snow or raking leaves will work their arm muscles, and climbing trees will work their whole body.

FAMILY TIME



Children will naturally model the examples that are set for them. If parents wish to raise healthy and fit children, this can be much easier to do if the parents themselves are also fit and healthy. Families can also have physically active fun together by playing active games outside and by engaging in activities together. Take family walks and bike rides, play at the park, go swimming.

BOWLING



Take your child to your town's bowling alley. Invite the rest of your family, and encourage her to bring one or two friends. Participating in an afternoon of bowling gives your child a chance to be active without her feeling as if you are forcing them to exercise.

SWIMMING



Join an outdoor pool during the summer or a year-round indoor pool, and make swimming a family activity. Sign your kids up for classes. Encourage older children to join a swim team.

WALK OR BIKE



Institute a family policy of walking or biking instead of driving to get places that are nearby. Parents should model this as well. Encourage kids to get to school, the library or the store on their own power.

RUNNING



Running is perhaps the easiest way for kids to get exercise, especially if the kids are younger. Take a walk with your children and challenge them to see if they can "run to the next mailbox by the time I count to 10." If you are watching several kids, let them play tag.