

## YOUNG CHILDREN AND GETTING ACTIVE

Regular physical activity is an important part of a healthy lifestyle. Making physical activity a priority and encouraging good habits in children from an early age is important and can help them to develop the skills they need to continue being active throughout their lives.

Children that are not physically active enough will not have the chance to get these benefits and are at increased risk of becoming overweight or obese. This makes it harder for them to be active and keep up with others, either in sport or in play. They are also more likely to be prone to conditions such as Asthma, flat feet and joint sprains due to excessive weight.

Long term, being overweight or obese can contribute to conditions such as high blood pressure and cholesterol, Type II Diabetes and liver disease. Recent research has shown that warning signs for these conditions can be present in overweight teenagers as young as fifteen.



### Why is being physically active important for children?

#### CHILDREN 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; and
- Improve self-esteem.

(Australia's Physical Activity Recommendations for 5-12 year olds)



### How much activity do young children need?

It is recommended that preschoolers accumulate at least 60 minutes of daily structured physical activity; and spend at least 60 minutes a day (and up to several hours daily) in unstructured active play. Preschool aged children should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time.

This activity doesn't all have to be done at once. It can be built up throughout the day by walking to and from childcare (or even part of the way) with a parent/carer, active play at home or through organised activities.

As well as being active, it is important to limit the amount of time that children spend watching 'small screens' such as televisions, playing on the internet or computer games to no more than two hours a day.

## What can I do to help my children be active?

- **Be an active role model and have a positive attitude to being active.** If your children see you enjoying physical activity and having fun it can encourage them to participate.
- **Encourage active play** in the backyard, going for a fast walk, dancing to music, riding a bike or more vigorous activities like running, swimming, playing sports like soccer, netball or basketball.
- **Make time to be active as a family** – walk with your children to a local park, go bike riding or walk the dog.
- **Help your children 'play active'** by buying gifts that encourage physical activity such as balls, bats, skipping ropes and other equipment. This will be a fun way to help your children develop and practice their skills.
- **Park further away from your destination** (whether its childcare, sport or the shops) and walk the rest of the way.
- **Keep it interesting.** If you can, let your child try a variety of activities so that they can find one or more that they enjoy and want to continue with.
- **Start slowly and build up the amount of activity** your children do over time, particularly if they are not currently active.
- **Limit the amount of time your children are allowed to spend watching television,** surfing the internet and playing on the computer and encourage active alternatives.

## DON'T FORGET..

- Children should wear appropriate footwear such as well-fitted and supportive sandals or joggers. Thongs are not suitable for active play as they do not give the foot any support.
- Hats and 30+ sunscreen must be worn when being active outdoors.
- Encourage children to drink plenty of water when they are being active or playing outdoors.
- Balance out an active lifestyle for your child with a healthy diet – remembering to limit foods that are high in saturated fat, sugar and/or salt.



For more information and ideas on healthy eating and physical activity go to [www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au](http://www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au)

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