

Make Fitness Fun for Kids

Do your children spend more time inside the house watching television or playing computer games than they spend playing outside? Do you know that motivating your children to be active not only improves their health and well-being now, but may also benefit their health later in life?

Too many kids today are not active!

Inactivity has become an epidemic among children. Children today are less active than they were just a few years ago because of many factors, including less participation in daily physical education classes at school.

Kids need to be active!

Did you know that:

- **Lack of exercise is a major reason for the growing rate of obesity among children.** Watching TV for even as few as two to five hours per week is linked to being overweight. Sadly enough, the number of children who watch five or more hours of television per day has increased dramatically in recent years. Instead of just watching TV, encourage your children to spend time each day in play that requires them to be physically active. Health professionals agree that physical activity is essential to helping children not only reach, but more importantly *maintain*, a healthy weight.
- **Exercise can strengthen children's bones now as well as later in life.** Children who participate in weight-bearing, impact sports such as running, gymnastics, tumbling, and dance have higher bone density than children who are not active or children whose major activity is a non-weight-bearing exercise such as swimming. Building strong bones in childhood helps to maintain bone health later in life.
- **Active children may increase their chance of becoming healthy adults.** Children who enjoy exercise may develop a lifelong, healthy habit of being physically active. If they stay active as adults, they will enjoy better health and may live longer than their less active peers. Physical activity can decrease the risk of obesity, cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, and heart disease among adults. People who remain active on a regular basis tend to live longer than people who are not regularly active.
- **Children need to consume a healthy diet and plenty of fluids for active play.** Children need to consume adequate calories to provide them with the energy to be active. Foods provide children with the energy and nutrients they need to grow and the energy they need for active play. Active children also need to drink plenty of fluids before, during, and after exercise.

The U.S. government and numerous health professional organizations recommend that children and adolescents participate in 30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week.

Motivate your kids to move for the fun of it!

The key word to motivating kids to be active is "fun." According to experts, children participate in physical activity for enjoyment.

Take one step at a time. Encourage your child to swim, bike, or play ball with friends, or take a 10-minute activity break while doing homework, watching TV, or playing computer or video games. Motivate your child to participate in school-organized sports and physical education classes!

Become a role model! Get the whole family involved in games, bicycling, or other active play. If you're involved, your child is more likely to get involved. Participating in physical activities together may also increase the amount of quality time you spend with your child.

Source: American Dietetic Association