

FitFuture

strategies for better living.

Series on Fitness & Nutrition for Families

Child's Play Offers More Than Fun

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Every child's job is to PLAY! Children love to run and jump, climb and crawl, tumble and stretch. Although children don't know it, active play is more than just fun. Active play fosters sharing, curiosity and independence. During play, children learn to cooperate with others. Playing gives them the freedom to explore the world around them and make decisions about how to control their actions.

Active play is also important for the development of body skills. Children develop strength, flexibility, body awareness and endurance while they play. Play allows children to release extra energy (as adults, we exercise to release stress!).

Since *moving more* and *sitting less* is an essential part of maintaining a healthy weight, children who engage in active play and have adults who restrict their sedentary activities, are less likely to be overweight. Helping your children develop an active lifestyle at a young age can help protect them from chronic diseases associated with being inactive and overweight later on in life.

Adults who are active have children who are active, so be a good role model and look for ways to be active as a family. Here are more tips from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- Make physical activity part of your family's daily routine such as designating time for family walks or playing active games together.
- Provide opportunities for children to be active by playing with them. Give them active toys and equipment, and take them to places where they can be active.
- Offer positive reinforcement for the physical activities in which your child participates and encourage them as they express interest in new activities.
- Make physical activity fun. Fun activities can be anything the child enjoys, either structured or non-structured. They may range from team sports, individual sports, and/or recreational activities such as walking, running, skating, bicycling, swimming, playground activities, and free-time play.
- Limit the time your children watch television or play video games to no more than two hours per day. Instead, encourage your children to find fun activities to do with family members or on their own that simply involve more activity (walking, playing chase, dancing).

Recommended Daily Activity Levels

| Age | Minutes of structured physical activity (adult-led) | Minutes of unstructured physical activity (free play) | Minutes of general physical activity | Hours of inactivity, other than sleep |
|-------|---|---|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 2-3 | At least 30 | At least 60 | | 1 or less |
| 4-5 | At least 60 | At least 60 | | 2 or less |
| 6-12 | | | At least 60 | 2 or less |
| 13-18 | | | At least 60 | 2 or less |

National Association of Sports and Physical Activity and the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans

