

Youth Physical Activity:

The Role of Families



Being physically active is one of the most important steps to being healthy. Families play an important role in helping youth learn to be active and stay active throughout their lives.

How Does Physical Activity Help?

- Builds strong bones and muscles.¹
- Decreases the likelihood of developing obesity and risk factors for diseases like type 2 diabetes and heart disease.¹
- May reduce anxiety and depression and promote positive mental health.¹

How Much Physical Activity Do Youth Need?

- **Children and adolescents should do 60 minutes (1 hour) or more of physical activity daily.²**
 - **Aerobic Activities:** Most of the 60 or more minutes per day should be either moderate- or vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity. Vigorous-intensity physical activity should be included at least 3 days per week.
 - Examples of aerobic activities include bike riding, brisk walking, running, dancing, and playing active games like tag, soccer, and basketball.
 - **Muscle-strengthening Activities:** Include muscle-strengthening physical activity on at least 3 days of the week as part of the 60 or more minutes.
 - Examples of muscle-strengthening activities for younger children include: gymnastics, playing on a jungle gym, and climbing a tree.
 - Examples of muscle-strengthening activities for adolescents include push-ups, pull-ups, and weightlifting exercises.
 - **Bone-strengthening Activities:** Include bone-strengthening physical activity on at least 3 days of the week as part of the 60 or more minutes.
 - Examples of bone-strengthening activities include hopping, skipping, jumping, running, and sports like gymnastics, basketball, and tennis.
- Some activities may address more than one category at a time. For example, gymnastics is both muscle-strengthening and bone-strengthening. Running is aerobic and bone-strengthening.
- Activities should be age-appropriate, enjoyable, and offer variety.²

How Physically Active Are Youth?

- Among 9th–12th grade students, only 11% of girls and 24% of boys said they were physically active at least 60 minutes per day.³
- Among 9–13 year olds, only 39% said they participated in organized physical activity.⁴
- In 2007, only 30% of 9th–12th grade students said they attended physical education classes every day.⁵
- In 1969, 41% of students walked or biked to school. By 2001, only 13% of students walked or biked to school.⁶
- Among 9th–12th grade students, 35% reported watching 3 or more hours of television per day.⁵

Is My Child's Aerobic Activity Moderate or Vigorous?

- When your child does moderate-intensity activity, his heart will beat faster than normal and he will breathe harder than normal. On a scale of 0 to 10, where sitting is a 0 and 10 is the highest level of effort possible, moderate-intensity activity is a 5 or 6.
 - Examples of moderate-intensity activities include brisk walking, hiking, rollerblading, skateboarding, bicycle riding, baseball and softball.



- When your child does vigorous-intensity activity, her heart will beat much faster than normal and she will breathe much harder than normal. On a scale of 0 to 10, vigorous-intensity activity is a 7 or 8.
 - Examples of vigorous-intensity activities include soccer, ice or field hockey, jumping rope, or active games that involve running.

What Kinds of Activities Are Appropriate for My Child?

- It is important for youth to participate in activities that are safe and good for their growth and development. Younger children like to move between short bursts of activity followed by short periods of rest. Adolescents do more structured and longer activities than younger children. For example:
 - For aerobic physical activity, younger children like to run, jump, or play tag for short periods of time and then take a break. Adolescents can run for longer periods of time.
 - For muscle strengthening activity, younger children enjoy active play such as gymnastics, playing on a jungle gym or climbing a tree. Adolescents may start a structured weight-lifting program.

What Can Families Do To Get and Keep Their Children Active?

Youth learn a lot about physical activity from their families. Family members who enjoy physical activity can help children enjoy physical activity. Caregivers play a very important role in determining youth participation in physical activities—how much, how often, and what type of physical activity. Caregivers can also help youth balance non-active time periods (watching TV, using the computer, or talking on the phone) and physical activity.



Model Positive Physical Activity:

- Lead an active lifestyle yourself.
- Make family time physical activity time.
 - Build physical activity into your family's daily routine. Take a walk after dinner together or do housework or yard work together.
 - Use local, low-cost, or free places like public parks, baseball fields, and basketball courts to be active.
 - Attend family nights or other physical activity events at your child's school or local community centers.
 - Be active whenever possible. Walk or ride bikes to school or the bus stop instead of riding in a car. Parents of young children can enjoy the walk or bike ride, too.
 - Include physical activity breaks in events such as long car trips, vacations, or visits to relatives or friends. Bring along beach balls, kites, jump ropes, or other items that can be used for active play.



Help Children Be Active With Their Friends:

- Instead of watching television or playing video games, encourage your children to be active with their friends by playing tag, basketball, or by riding bikes.
- Give your children toys that encourage physical activity like balls, kites, and jump ropes.
- Make special events physical activity events, such as activity-based birthday parties or other group celebrations.
- Encourage your children to join a sports team or try a new physical activity.



Encourage Physical Activity for Youth:

- Help youth participate in team or individual sports, as well as in noncompetitive activities such as bicycling, hiking, jogging, and swimming.
- Be positive about the physical activities your children engage in and encourage their interest in new activities.
- Help children be physically active by taking them to and from activities and events or helping them find other ways to get there.
- Encourage children to talk about how physical activity makes them feel and how much fun they have when they are active.



Limit “Screen Time” (time watching TV, playing video games, or using the computer):

- Know how much screen time you and your children are getting and then set limits for the entire family.
 - The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) states that children 2 years or older should spend no more than 2 hours a day watching TV, playing video games, and using the computer.⁷
- Do not use screen time as a reward or punishment for your child.
- Turn commercial breaks into activity breaks when watching TV. Do jumping jacks, push-ups, or crunches or run in place during commercial breaks.
- Turn off the television during mealtime and homework time.
- Put the TV and computer in common areas like the living room instead of your child’s bedroom.



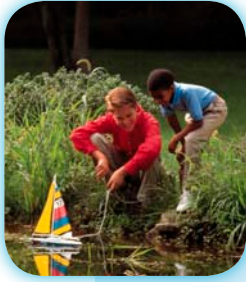
Partner With Your Child’s School:

- Find out what physical activities are offered at your child’s school.
- Talk to the principal or write a letter to the district superintendent if you think there should be more physical education at your child’s school.
- Become a member of the school health advisory council or the Parent Teacher Association (PTA).
- Encourage the school to implement a comprehensive school physical activity program. This includes quality physical education, recess, before- and after-school physical activity clubs, walk- and bike-to-school programs, and school staff wellness programs.⁸
- Help organize special events like walk-, dance-, or bike-a-thons, walk- or bike-to-school day, or a walking school bus.
- Volunteer to help with after-school physical activity programs or sports teams.

Where Can I Find Additional Information About Youth Physical Activity?

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2008. Available at: <http://www.health.gov/paguidelines>.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Healthy Youth! Physical Activity. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/physicalactivity/>.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Making Physical Activity a Part of a Child’s Life. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/getactive/children.html>.
- Alliance for a Healthier Generation. Good Health Starts at Home. Available at: http://www.healthiergeneration.org/uploadedFiles/For_Parents/ParentResourceBook.pdf.
- National Association for Sport and Physical Education. Teacher Toolbox, Physical Activity Calendars. Available at: http://iweb.aahperd.org/naspe/template.cfm?template=teachers_toolbox.html





Be Active and Play, 60 minutes, every day!

References

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3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2007. Unpublished data.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Media Campaign Longitudinal Survey, 2002. *MMWR* 2003;52(33):785-8.
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2007. *MMWR*. 2008;57(No.SS-4):1-131.
6. McDonald MC. Active transport to school: trends among U.S. schoolchildren, 1969-2001. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 2007;32(6):509-16.
7. American Academy of Pediatrics. Committee on Public Education. American Academy of Pediatrics: Children, adolescents, and television. *Pediatrics* 2001;107(5):1043-8.
8. National Association for Sport and Physical Education. Comprehensive school physical activity programs position statement. Reston, VA: National Association for Sport and Physical Education; 2008. Available at: http://iweb.aahperd.org/naspe/pdf_files/CSPAP_Online.pdf.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Division of Adolescent and School Health
www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth

August 2009