

Turn Off the TV...Tune into Outdoor Adventure

CHILDREN ARE ACTIVE AND ENERGETIC

Preschoolers love being busy - bouncing, running, swinging, sliding. Research shows that it is a crucial time of life for developing physical skills, imagination and confidence, as well as helping to improve these skills in everyday activities. Being active from an early age helps children develop a strong healthy body for the future.

Preschoolers need opportunities to exercise. To learn to control and coordinate the large muscles in their arms and legs, children need to throw and catch balls, run, jump, climb, and dance to music. To learn to control and coordinate the small muscles in their hands and fingers, they need to color with crayons, put together puzzles, use blunt-tipped-safety-scissors, zip their jacket and grasp small objects. Preschools are an ideal way to help build a child's confidence and self esteem through physical activity. Coordination, balance and rhythm can all be improved through basic activities. Group activities help children learn important social skills.

Because young children naturally move around a lot, many caregivers assume they are getting all the physical activity they need. But TV and video games keep a lot of preschoolers sedentary for longer than parents may realize.

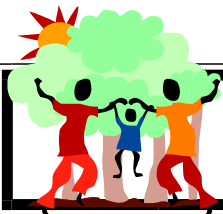
New guidelines for children under age 5 call for certain types of physical activity every day from birth. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education recommends common sense, inexpensive activities designed to spur development of specific motor skills at different ages. Here are some examples:

For infants, from birth to 12 months:

- Brightly colored, easy-to-grasp toys that can be squeezed or have different textures encourage reaching and grasping.
- A baby just starting to learn to roll over may be motivated to keep trying if parents wave a favorite toy just out of reach.
- Provide at least a 5-by-7-foot blanket for playing, rolling and other large-muscle activities, and later, a safe area to explore while crawling.

Toddlers, ages 12 months to 36 months:

- Bounce, throw and chase balls to develop hand-eye coordination.
- Dancing to music and follow-along songs promote body awareness and balance.



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- During meal preparation, create a game by asking them to help carry something -- that won't spill or break -- to the table instead of putting him in a high chair or playpen.
- Stair climbing develops leg muscles and coordination, but should be taught on carpeted steps with an adult to prevent falls.

Preschoolers, ages 3 to 5 years:

- Help the child walk along a line on the ground or in a safe area, not around cars or along a sidewalk curb, to promote balance.
- Lay out objects to create a maze or tell a child to run around a tree and back, providing vigorous exercise plus mastering turns and balance.
- Around age 3, children learn to hop. Ask the child to hop first on one foot, then the other, promoting balance and strengthening leg muscles. Promote different rhythms by asking them to skip, learned around age 4.
- Games should be noncompetitive. Preschoolers lack the social and cognitive development for organized team sports, which can leave them frustrated and block later interest in the sport.

Other Guidelines:

- Part of an infant's day should be spent in structured activity with a caregiver -- playing peek-a-boo or patty-cake, being carried to and exploring new environments.
- Do not keep infants or toddlers in baby seats or other restrictive settings for long periods. Even young infants move differently when placed on a blanket on the floor than when in a baby seat.
- Toddlers should accumulate at least 30 minutes of structured physical activity, and preschoolers at least an hour, during each day. Play follow-along songs, chase a ball; for older children, balancing games or tumbling increase strength and body control.
- Toddlers and preschoolers should spend at least an hour, preferably more, a day in free play -- exploring, experimenting, and imitating. Caregivers should provide safe objects to ride, push, pull, balance on and climb.
- Toddlers and preschoolers should not be sedentary for more than an hour at a time except when sleeping.

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