

Physical Activity for Infants and Toddlers

It's never too early to be active. Even infants and toddlers need physical activity in order to grow and develop properly. Infants can learn to reach, grab, grasp, sit up, and roll over. Toddlers love to walk, run, climb, and jump.

Why do we want children to be active?

- To ensure normal growth and development
- To instill good health habits
- To help decrease the problem of childhood obesity
- To help control blood sugar levels
- To build strong bones and muscles
- To build strength and endurance
- To help children build self-confidence and self-esteem
- To gain independence
- To explore their world
- To have fun!



What can I do to encourage physical activity?

Newborn to Six Months:

- Use strollers, cribs, infant seats, etc. as little as possible to allow infants to move freely.
- Help build shoulder and neck strength with the use of “tummy time”.
- Provide toys that allow for grasping.
- Encourage reaching by placing a toy just at the edge of the infants’ reach.
- Interact with infants to keep them interested in moving.



Six to Twelve Months:

- Create a safe place for large muscle moving, such as rolling over, creeping, and crawling.
- Limit time in high chairs, cribs, and exercise saucers
- Use rhymes and finger-plays to encourage small motor development.



Twelve to Twenty-four Months:



- Provide plenty of supervised physical activity each day, such as practicing walking or climbing. Toddlers should get 30 minutes or more of structured physical activity every day.
- Provide at least an hour of free play every day.
- Know which skills your children are working on and help them achieve these milestones. After learning to walk, a child will learn to pull toys while walking, carry toys while walking, kick a ball, use the stairs, and walk backward.
- Don't allow a toddler to be inactive for more than one hour unless the child is sleeping.
- Avoid screen time, including TV, videos, DVDs, and computer time. These activities are prohibited for children younger than two.

Twenty-four to Thirty-six Months:

- Help children learn and master the ability to balance on one foot, climb, throw a ball overhand, run and jump, kick a ball forward, and pedal a tricycle.
- Have plenty of equipment that supports large and small muscle development
- Create opportunities to experiment with unstructured activity experiences, such as places to crawl under and around, grasping large balls and inflatable toys, or digging and building in sandboxes
- Turn on the music and dance together
- Be active with the children
- Take children outdoors every day as the weather allows in the AM and PM.

Remember that physical activity is very important for children and they love to imitate. Be active and have fun with them!



Sources:

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