

FAMILY RESOURCE

C O N N E C T I O N

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Preventing Childhood Obesity

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, childhood obesity has risen dramatically in the United States in the past decade, particularly among young children from low-income and minority families. Lack of physical activity and poor nutrition are significant contributors to childhood obesity.

Overweight preschool children are now suffering the precursors of chronic diseases and negative health consequences, formerly seen only in adults. These include:

- Depression/Social Isolation
- Type II Diabetes
- Cardiovascular Diseases
- High Blood Pressure
- High Cholesterol
- Orthopedic Problems/Destruction of Weight-Bearing Joints

If this trend continues, children of this generation are not likely to live as long as their parents. Research shows that by influencing children early in their lives to adopt active and fit lifestyles and make healthy nutrition choices, childhood obesity can be prevented and even reversed.

When most adults think about exercise, they imagine working out in the gym, on a treadmill, or lifting weights. But for children, exercise means playing and being physically active. Kids exercise when they play on the playground, when they play soccer, or attend dance class. They are also exercising when they ride bikes and play games like tag.

(continued)

Mission

To open “New Horizons” of self-esteem and potential for the little people entrusted to our care, their families, and our employees by providing and continuously improving the best child development on the planet!



The Many Benefits of Exercise

Everyone can benefit from regular exercise. A child who is active will:

- Have stronger muscles and bones
- Have a leaner body because exercise helps control body fat
- Be less likely to become overweight
- Decrease the risk of developing Type II Diabetes
- Possibly lower blood pressure and blood cholesterol levels
- Have a better outlook on life

In addition to the health benefits of regular exercise, children who are physically fit sleep better and are better able to handle the physical and emotional challenges that a typical day presents; ie., running to catch a bus, bending down to tie a shoe, or studying for a test.

The Three Elements of Fitness

If you have ever watched children on a playground, then you have seen the three elements of fitness in action. The child:

- Runs away from the child that is “it” (**endurance**);
- Crosses the monkey bars (**strength**);
- Bends down to tie his or her shoes (**flexibility**).

Parents and teachers can encourage children to participate in a variety of activities so that they can work on all three elements.

Endurance is developed when someone regularly engages in aerobic activity (aerobic means “with air”). During aerobic exercise, the heart beats faster and a person breathes harder. When done regularly and for continuous periods of time, aerobic activity strengthens the heart and improves the body’s ability to deliver oxygen to all its cells.

Aerobic exercise can be fun for both adults *and* children. Some examples of aerobic activities include:

- basketball
- bicycling
- ice skating
- in-line skating
- soccer
- swimming
- tennis
- walking
- jogging
- running

Improving **strength** does not have to mean lifting weights. Although some children benefit from lifting weights, it should be done under the supervision of an experienced adult who works with children. However, most kids do not need a formal weight-training program to be strong. Push-ups, stomach crunches, pull-ups, and other exercises help tone and strengthen muscles. Children also incorporate strength activities in their play when they climb, do a handstand, or wrestle.

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Stretching exercises help improve **flexibility**, allowing muscles and joints to bend and move easily through their full range of motion. Kids look for opportunities every day to stretch when they try to get a toy just out of reach, do jumping jacks, or other reaching type games.

How Much Exercise Is Enough?

The percentage of children who are overweight has more than doubled over the past 30 years. Although many factors are contributing to this epidemic, kids are becoming more sedentary. In other words, they are sitting around a lot more than they used to.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the average child is watching about 3 hours of television a day. And the average child spends 5 1/2 hours on all media combined, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

It is important to ensure that children are getting enough exercise. So, how much is enough? According to the dietary guidelines from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), all children 2 years and older should get at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise on most, preferably all, days of the week. In addition to providing more practical advice on how to give your child a healthy, balanced diet, the new dietary guidelines also suggest that children eat more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.



Here are the current activity recommendations for children, according to the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE):

<u>Age</u>	<u>Minimum Daily Activity</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Infant	No specific requirements	Physical activity should encourage motor development
Toddler	1 1/2 hours	30 minutes planned physical activity AND 60 minutes unstructured physical activity (free play)
Preschooler	2 hours	60 minutes planned physical activity AND 60 minutes unstructured physical activity (free play)
School-age	1 hour or more	Break up into bouts of 15 minutes or more

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You can find out what guidelines are appropriate for your child by logging on to the USDA's interactive website for the revised food guide pyramid at <http://kidshealth.org/parent/food/general/pyramid.html> and hit the *Additional Resources* tab. The site allows you to enter your child's age, gender, and activity level to get one of 12 pyramids that make recommendations for total calories and amounts from each food, as well as some recommendations for specific foods, such as whole grains, beans, and orange veggies.

It is also important to remember that young children should not be inactive for prolonged periods of time – no more than 1 hour unless they are sleeping. School-age children should not be inactive for periods longer than 2 hours. One of the best ways to get children to be more active is to limit the amount of time spent in sedentary activities, especially watching TV or playing video games. The AAP recommends that children under the age of 2 years watch no TV at all and that screen time should be limited to no more than 1 to 2 hours of quality programming a day for children 2 years and older.

Raising a Fit Child

Combining regular physical activity with a healthy diet is the key to a healthy lifestyle. By understanding the importance of being physically active, you can instill fun and healthy habits that will last a lifetime.

Here are some tips for raising a fit child:

- Help your child participate in a variety of activities that are right for his or her age.
- Establish a regular schedule for physical activity.
- Incorporate activity into daily routines, such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Embrace a healthier lifestyle yourself, so you will be a positive role model for your family.
- Keep it fun, so you can count on your child to come back for more.

New Horizon Academy promotes healthy nutrition choices and active physical movement experiences in all our programs. The curriculum for each age group offers a variety of movement activities, games, and ideas to promote healthy physical development and exercise. The New Horizon Academy curriculum also provides numerous nutritious snack ideas, as well as menus that promote healthy eating. Ask your child's teacher or your center director if you are looking for more ideas for physical activities or healthy snack options for your child.

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