



How Much Exercise Should Children Get Daily?

Q. My two grandchildren are mildly overweight. Their pediatrician recommended more physical activity and less sugar. I watch them every day after school and some weekends and want to help. How much exercise should children get daily?

A. I'm glad that you are helping your grandchildren and doing something about the few extra pounds while it's a small, manageable problem. Young children are naturally active however as they get older they often become couch potatoes while they watch TV or play video games. Years ago children spent hours playing outside, running, climbing and jumping rope. Parents didn't have to worry about them roaming the neighborhood. Today however, parents must diligently watch their children and they are often afraid to let them leave their yard because of child predators. Childhood obesity can have lifelong effects if not eliminated early. This often calls for the adults in the children's lives to make changes as well. Children don't buy the groceries and don't make money to go to McDonalds. It is important to offer a healthy diet when they are young and set a good example while they are young, as well. Your pediatrician is right to tell you to increase the activity level and cut out sugars and snacks or at least limit them to once a week. Mildly overweight children don't need a diet! You also don't want to draw too much attention to their weight which can make them feel unattractive and self-conscious. Tell them that the whole family is going to start eating better and exercising more so that they can all be healthier.

What Do The Stats Say?

According to the Centers for Disease Control

- Childhood obesity has more than doubled in children and quadrupled in adolescents in the past 30 years.
- The percentage of children aged 6–11 years in the United States who were obese

increased from 7% in 1980 to nearly 18% in 2012. Similarly, the percentage of adolescents aged 12–19 years who were obese increased from 5% to nearly 21% over the same period.

- In 2012, more than one third of children and adolescents were overweight or obese.
- *Overweight* is defined as having excess body weight for a particular height from fat, muscle, bone, water, or a combination of these factors. *Obesity* is defined as having excess body fat.

- Overweight and obesity are the result of “caloric imbalance”—too few calories expended for the amount of calories consumed—and are affected by various genetic, behavioral, and environmental factors.

- Obese youth are more likely to have risk factors for cardiovascular disease, such as high cholesterol or high blood pressure. In a population-based sample of 5- to 17-year-olds, 70% of obese youth had at least one risk factor for cardiovascular disease.

- Obese adolescents are more likely to have prediabetes, a condition in which blood glucose levels indicate a high risk for development of diabetes.

- Children and adolescents who are obese are at greater risk for bone and joint problems, sleep apnea, and social and psychological problems such as stigmatization and poor self-esteem.

- Children and adolescents who are obese are likely to be obese as adults and are therefore more at risk for adult health problems such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, several types of cancer, and osteoarthritis. One study showed that children who became obese as early as age 2 were more likely to be obese as adults.

- Overweight and obesity are associated with increased risk for many types of cancer, including cancer of the breast, colon, endometrium, esophagus, kidney, pancreas, gall bladder, thyroid, ovary, cervix, and prostate, as well as multiple myeloma and Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

- strong muscles and bones
- weight control
- decreased risk of developing type 2 diabetes
- better sleep
- a better outlook on life
- more alert mind and memory skills

Childhood obesity has both immediate and long-term effects on health and well-being.

Immediate health effects:

Long-term health effects:

Benefits of Being Active

When kids are active, their bodies can do the things they want and need them to do. Why? Because regular exercise provides these benefits:

Healthy, physically active kids also are more likely to be **academically motivated**, alert, and successful. And physical competence builds self-esteem at every age.

What Motivates Kids?

So there's a lot to gain from regular physical activity, but how do you encourage kids to do it? The three keys are:

1. **Choosing the right activities for a child's age:** If you don't, the child may be bored or frustrated.
2. **Giving kids plenty of opportunity to be active:** Kids need parents to make activity easy by providing equipment and taking them to playgrounds and other active spots.
3. **Keeping the focus on FUN!!:** Kids won't do something they don't enjoy.

When kids enjoy an activity, they want to do more of it. Practicing a skill — whether it's swimming or riding a tricycle — improves their abilities and helps them feel accomplished, especially when the effort is noticed and praised. These good feelings often make kids want to continue the activity and even try others.

How Much Exercise Should My Child Get and What kind?

According to the CDC children should get at least an hour of physical activity a day. They need the following at least 3 days a week:

1. Aerobic

Ages 6-9 Games that involve running and chasing, hiking, jumping rope, karate, riding a bicycle, rollerblading, running, skateboarding, sports such as hockey, basketball, swimming, or gymnastics and brisk walking

Ages 10 – 12 Canoeing or kayaking, cheerleading, dancing, games that involve running and chasing, gymnastics, hiking, house and yard work, ice skating, jumping rope, karate, riding a bicycle, rollerblading, running, skateboarding, skiing or snowboarding, sports such as baseball, softball, basketball, soccer, tennis, hockey, or swimming and brisk walking

Ages 13-17 Aerobic exercise classes, canoeing or kayaking, cheerleading, dancing, gymnastics, hiking, house and yard work, ice skating, jumping rope, karate or other martial arts, riding a bicycle, rollerblading, rowing, running, skateboarding, skiing or snowboarding, sports such as baseball, softball, basketball, volleyball, soccer, lacrosse, tennis, hockey, basketball, football, fencing, badminton, or swimming and brisk walking

2. Muscle Strengthening such as push-ups and sit ups

3. Bone Strengthening such as jumping rope, playing soccer or running.

If your children have gym at school at least twice a week that is active and play outside every day, they are probably getting their 60 minutes a day. If not you can become more active as a family. Take walks after dinner, play active games together, go hiking on the weekends and go swimming in your local pool. It's a good idea to involve kids in sports, karate or dance, too. Remember the adults in their lives have to set a good example, too. It's unfair to eat a big slice of cake in front of children and tell them they can't have any. Good luck! Info gathered from:

www.kidshealth.com

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<http://www.urmc.rochester.edu/>

<http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/children.html>

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