

ELEMENTARY edition

A PUBLICATION FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PARENTS



Get **MOVING!**

Physical education in and out of school

Physical education has taken its place alongside more traditional elementary school academics like reading, writing and math—and with good reason. Research shows that physically active children have a greater chance of being healthy for life. They are also more likely to do well in school.

Elementary physical education—building strong bodies and minds

Today, the goal of school-based physical education is to tune into the abilities and interests of all children, including those with special needs. Through the physical education curriculum, children are introduced to a host of games and physical activities that will not only help them become better learners, but can spark a lifelong desire to remain physically active and fit.

Children also learn about the benefits of the exercise they are performing (e.g., cardiovascular health, stress management, maintaining a healthy weight, muscle strength, endurance and flexibility), sportsmanship and cooperation, how to exercise safely and how to make healthy food choices.

Physically active children have the strength and physical development they need to hold a pencil properly and form letters and numbers, hold their heads and bodies upright for lengths of time and to make proper eye contact with teachers as they learn. According to a study published in the *Journal of School Health*, physically active children also show increased concentration, improved test

scores in mathematics, reading and writing and fewer disruptive behaviors.

Making fitness a family affair

The National Academies' Institute of Medicine recommends that children and adults participate in at least one hour of moderately intense exercise daily. Though important, the two to three physical education classes most children take part in at school each week are only a portion of what they need. Children should be

encouraged to be active outside of school every day. While busy schedules, limitations of open space and safety concerns may make this recommendation difficult to achieve, there are some easy ways for you and your children to fit in fitness.

Here are some ideas to try:

- ★ **Play together.** Children whose parents are physically active are much more likely to develop healthy attitudes toward being active themselves. Not only are you a positive role model for activity—and getting some exercise, too—you can be assured that your children will be safe as they play.
- ★ **Encourage your children to try a variety of activities.** Organized sports and games are not for everyone. Singular activities such as

walking, bike riding and running around the backyard or playground with friends are also wonderful ways to stay fit.

- ★ **Break activity down into manageable chunks.** Use the 10 minutes you have before starting dinner for a brisk walk around the block or a quick game of catch. Take the stairs rather than the elevator on the way up to the dentist's office. With younger children, whose attention spans and stamina can be limited, it is sometimes better to piece together many activities that take short amounts of time rather than one hour-long activity.
- ★ **Tap into children's interests.** Take a winter nature hike with your budding scientists. Encourage your children's dramatic and expressive sides by dancing to different types of music or using your bodies to act out a favorite story or song. Sneak in some math by using a stopwatch to time how fast they can travel a set distance on foot or by bike.
- ★ **Play the active games you enjoyed as a child with your family.** Teaching your children what you liked to do as a child will encourage their physical fitness while also teaching about family history.
- ★ **Limit children's combined television, computer and game time** (including toys such as Game Boys and Xbox) to one to 1-1/2 hours daily. Watching television, using computers and playing video games limit the amount of time children might otherwise spend with physical activity and sports. If time is tight, consider a school-week ban on these activities to help make room for more physical pursuits.

Walking in a winter wonderland

Although the weather outside can be frightful this time of year, it doesn't mean fitness needs to hibernate until spring. Shoveling the sidewalk and pushing snowballs to make a snowman are great aerobic activities and help develop muscle strength and problem solving abilities. Sledding and scaling piles of snow are low-tech winter activities that get children breathing fresh air and exercising their bodies.

When setting out on winter adventures, make sure you and your children dress in layers of warm clothes and wear boots, scarves and hats.

Also, bring along snacks if you plan to be outdoors for a length of time—children burn calories faster when playing outside in cold temperatures.

For ideas on what to do outside this winter (and what you can do inside when the weather is truly too miserable), check the following books and Web sites:

Go Outside: Over 130 Activities for Outdoor Adventures (Paperback) by Nancy Blakey
Snowmen: Snow Creatures, Crafts, and Other Winter Projects by Peter Cole
<http://www.wintertrails.org>
<http://www.winterfeelsgood.com>
<http://www.inquiry.net/outdoor/winter/activities/index.htm>



DID YOU KNOW...

- * Obesity among children and adolescents has tripled over the past three decades.
- * Twenty-one percent of upstate New York third grade children are overweight.
- * Twenty-four percent of high school students from upstate New York are overweight or are at risk of overweight.
- * Poor diet and physical inactivity are the second leading causes of preventable death in the United States

Source: New York State Department of Health, <http://www.health.state.ny.us/prevention/obesity/activ8kids/#statistics>

Obesity Risks

Many children are overweight because they do not exercise enough and/or they eat unhealthy or too much food. Overweight and obesity can lead to learning problems in school as well as health problems. Children who do not eat properly or do not get enough exercise are more likely to become overweight or obese and may increase their risk of

developing other diseases and conditions. These diseases are more common in adults, but are increasingly being seen in children. They include:

- Type 2 diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Joint problems
- Asthma
- Sleep disturbances
- Depression

Source: New York State Department of Health, <http://www.health.state.ny.us/prevention/obesity/activ8kids/#statistics>

Exercise is healthy fun

Children who are active tend to be more confident, have greater sense of well-being, and experience better health. The only way to help keep children healthy and fit is to get them to do physical activity from the time they are small children. That means limiting their time in front of the TV and video games and start moving.

Tips for raising heart-healthy & active children

- ▶ Set a good example. You can help your children develop good physical activity habits at an early age. Don't just sit at home in front of the TV or computer. Go for a walk or take the kids to the playground.
- ▶ Limit television, movies, videos and computer games to less than two hours a day. Use a simple cooking timer to let your children know when time is up.
- ▶ Plan family outings and vacations that involve walking, hiking, biking or swimming.
- ▶ Give your children household chores that require some physical effort. This includes raking leaves, scrubbing floors and taking out the garbage. Be sure that the chore is the right amount of work for the right age. A five-year-old should not scrub the floor, but can help fold laundry and make the bed.
- ▶ Ask your children what sports and activities they like. Find out about lessons or clubs for these types of activities. Most schools and community centers offer free or low cost sports activities in the afternoons and on weekends. Check your local newspaper's Community Calendar for suggestions.
- ▶ If it's safe...walk or ride a bike instead of driving. Use stairs instead of elevators and escalators. Park your car a little further away than usual so you and your children can walk a little more. Walk the malls this winter.
- ▶ When buying gifts for your children and family members, choose items that will help with their physical fitness—a jump rope, hula hoop, mini trampoline, tennis racket, baseball bat, golf clubs or even a youth membership at the local YMCA or YWCA.
- ▶ When your children say "I'm bored," suggest a fun activity that gets them moving. Turn on some music and have them make up a dance contest. Challenge them to a jumping jack contest. Have them count how many steps it takes to walk around the house or apartment. Anything that gets the children up and moving is great.

other Fun Ways to keep grade schoolers active

- * **Coin Adventure:** Turn an ordinary neighborhood walk into an adventure. As you and your children step out the front door, flip a coin. If it comes up tails, turn left. If it comes up heads, turn right. Continue this at every corner. You never know where you'll end up. This is a great opportunity to giggle with your kids and enjoy some time talking, walking and exploring.
- * **Obstacle Course:** This is a great form of exercise and play doing things like walking or hopping along a winding garden hose, crawling under lawn chairs, balancing along a string placed on the ground or walking with a ball between your knees. Obstacle builders could be lawn furniture, a hose, a rope, sprinkler, balls, water balloons, hula hoops, etc.
- * **Monkey Bar Challenge:** At the playground, have your children go across the monkey bars and measure the number of bars they can cross without letting go. Practice often to see how many bars they can add over time.
- * **Activity on wheels:** Roll-erblade, skate or ride bikes together. It's best to stay on paths made especially for these activities in parks, but if you need to go on streets or roads be sure your child knows proper road safety and arm signals. Your children must ALWAYS wear a helmet when on a bike or skates. Knee pads and elbow pads are also recommended.

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Produced in cooperation with the Capital Region
 BOCES Communications Service.

February 2006 • Elementary Edition • "Get moving!"