

It's a simple fact. Whether you are an adult or an adolescent, physical activity enhances your health, both physically and mentally. Combined with eating well, physical activity is what the body (and mind) needs, and just what the doctor ordered.

Being physically active helps develop a more durable heart, veins, arteries, and muscles and also increases muscular strength and flexibility. Being physically active improves the functioning of the body, affects how much fat versus how much muscle a person has, and contributes to weight management. Increased physical activity has been associated with an increased life expectancy through decreasing risks of diseases such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and high blood pressure. Research has also shown that physical activity can reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress, and improve mood and overall psychological well-being.

Preteen and teen years are crucial for developing a healthy lifestyle. Being inactive during these years increases the probability of being inactive as an adult, whereas forming healthy habits will pay off for years to come.

Examples of Moderate Physical Activity

light bike riding ~ rollerblading ~ skate boarding ~ walking the dog ~ walking to school ~ golfing ~ playing on a jungle gym ~ flying a kite ~ playing hopscotch ~ playing catch ~ doing active chores ~ shooting baskets ~ tossing a Frisbee

Examples of Vigorous Physical Activity

fast bike riding ~ playing soccer ~ running ~ playing kickball ~ jogging ~ dancing ~ jumping rope ~ playing tag ~ aerobics ~ swimming laps ~ fast skating ~ karate

Specific physical activity recommendations for children ages 6 to 12:

- Participate in several rounds of moderate and vigorous, age-appropriate physical activity lasting 15 minutes or more each day.
- Accumulate at least 60 minutes, and up to several hours, of physical activity on all, or most, days of the week.
- It's best that children do not have extended periods (like two or more hours) of inactivity, especially during the daytime hours.

Specific physical activity recommendations for teens:

- Be physically active daily, or nearly every day.
- Engage in three or more sessions per week of moderate to vigorous physical activity that last 20 minutes or more at a time.

MOTIVATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Certain factors will influence whether or not children engage in physical activity and should be considered. For example:

- Is the activity fun for them?
- Have they been taught the necessary skills for the activity so they don't get discouraged?
- Have they developed confidence in their physical abilities?
- Are they guided and supported by adults in their life regarding physical activity in general and any specific activities they wish to engage in?
- Are they supported by cultural norms (e.g., school, peers, family) that make participation in physical activity desirable?

Various sports, of course, offer avenues for physical activity. However, organized sports are not for everyone. The important thing is to be physically active. So whether it's walking, wheeling one's wheel chair, gardening, biking, hiking, running, riding horseback, swimming, or playing soccer, what's important is being on the move and enjoying it!

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HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR KIDS BE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE:

- Be a physically active role model for your child
- Participate in physical activities with your kids
- Limit screen time (TV, computers, video games) to less than 2 hours per day
- Plan physical activities for the entire family that everyone can enjoy
- Provide a safe environment for your child and their friends to play/be active
- With your child's interests and skills in mind, choose physical-activity related gifts such as a tennis racket, a baseball mitt, rollerblades, a jump rope

SOURCES:

- American Heart Association
- Gatorade Sports Science Institute
- National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE)
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

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