

Kids in Motion

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When I watch children play I am always amazed to discover the endless energy they have. Children possess a natural proclivity toward physical activity and are designed to burn energy. Unfortunately, today's technology is diverting that energy to screen time activities such as TV, video games and computers.

A recent study on physical activity has shown that three- year- old children spend an average of only 20 to 25 minutes a day participating in active play, while only a third spend the conservatively recommended time of 60 minutes. Other studies have shown that active children have fewer chronic health problems, have higher self- esteem and are better able to meet the demands of daily physical activity than sedentary children. So how do we get our kids off the couch and outside playing?

The best motivators to get children moving are parents. Children look to parents to set examples on almost everything including leading a physically active lifestyle. Parents should try to have their children participate in some form of physical activity every day by replacing sedentary time with active time. Parents need to remember: "exercise should be fun." Parents should concentrate on the positive aspects of exercise by using praise when children try new things and should avoid embarrassing or scolding them. Once children become accustomed to the benefits of exercise, they will most likely make fitness a life long commitment.

An easy way to incorporate physical activity into your family's lifestyle is by planning family outings. Something as simple as going to the

park, taking a nature trail hike or even going to the mall gets children moving. Other ideas to get your children in motion are:

- Go for a bike ride.
- Take a swim. Use kickboards, floating devices and have relay races.
- Go to the playground. Encourage your younger children to use the monkey bars, swings and jungle gyms. These activities build core and upper body strength.
- Use chalk to draw a hopscotch board on the driveway so they can practice their jumping and hopping skills.
- Play jump rope, kickball and tag.
- Have them help rake leaves.
- In colder weather set up an obstacle course in your basement involving, crawling, climbing, rolling and tumbling. Be creative and award a prize when it is completed.
- Play Simon Says to get your children to do various stretches and exercises.

For school age children encourage them to join a team sport like soccer, baseball or field hockey enabling them to stay active on a regular basis. Be aware that in order to avoid injury to growing muscles, children should have both warm up and cool down sessions involving some basic stretches. Furthermore, if your child is sedentary and joining a team sport, let the coach know. Coaches should be developing training programs that consider the age and ability level of the child. In addition, each child should have a physical before playing in a sport to make sure that the child has no conditions that would limit participation. Questions regarding physical

conditioning programs should be directed to your pediatric physical therapist.