

Is Your Child Fit?

To be classified as 'fit' children between the ages of 5-18 years of age should participate in moderate to vigorous physical activity every day for a minimum of 60 minutes¹.

Moderate physical activity is any activity that is equivalent to a fast walk. It may include a range of games or active play such as kick to kick football, casual bike riding, backyard cricket, handball and skate boarding.

Vigorous physical activity is any activity that makes kids 'huff and puff' like running, swimming laps or organised sporting games that involve continuous physical movement such as football, soccer and netball.

To get the most benefit out of physical activity and to reach higher levels of fitness, children should participate in as many vigorous activities as possible rather than moderate activities, and they should aim to do them for more than 60 minutes per day or more.

There are many well established reasons for why kids need to be physically active and physically fit. Physical activity for kids:

- promotes healthy growth and development
- builds strong bones and muscles
- improves balance and develops skills
- maintains and develops flexibility
- achieves and maintains a healthy weight
- improves cardiovascular fitness
- fosters relaxation
- improves posture
- improves self esteem
- provides opportunities to make friends²

All these benefits help children grow into healthy adults, and help them to establish life long physical activity habits which contribute to life long good health.

But how do you get kids to participate in moderate to vigorous physical activity for a minimum of 60 minutes every day? This is the challenge faced by many parents, carers, schools, physical activity providers and kids themselves. The answer lies in a range of strategies – some of which suit some kids and some of which suit others.

- Start with what kids like doing – just like adults, kids are much more likely to stick to something if they like it from the outset.
- Encourage kids to list and then try a range of activities that they like the look of but which they have never had a go at.

¹ Australian Government Physical Activity Recommendations for Children and Young People 2005

² Active Kids are Healthy Kids, Australia' Physical Activity Recommendations for 5-12 Year Olds

- Provide kids with lots of variety so that even if they play a sport that they love they have other activities that they can turn to when they tire of the same sport or when they need a different but still physically active alternative
- Put an effort into finding a balance between organised sport, fun recreational activities and incidental physical activity. This means that in addition to an organised team sport (such as soccer, football, netball, hockey etc) encourage children to ride bikes, roller blade, play totem tennis, handball, kick to kick football or similar activities during their play time with their friends, and encourage them to walk or ride to school, and walk up steps instead of taking the lift. All these physical activities will quickly add up to 60 minutes or more per day, there will be plenty of variety built in to them and most kids won't even feel like they have involved more than an hour of physical effort.
- Incorporate physical activities into family outings and activities. For example, take cricket sets and footballs to picnics, ride bikes to friends' places, go horse riding or paddle boating or canoeing as a family activity.
- Give kids birthday and Christmas presents that encourage physical activity – eg, sporting equipment or clothes, vouchers to sports shops, free passes to pools, bowling alleys or horse trail rides.
- Complement these proactive physical activity encouragements with limiting computer games, Playstations and TV to 2 hours a day, or say that for every two hours of physical activity they can have an hour of computer games or TV.
- Provide only healthy and nutritious food at home, telling kids that it is fuel for their sport and their study, and that fast food is a 'treat' to be had only occasionally.

If physical activity is regularly and routinely incorporated into kids' lives it is not an effort for them. It becomes just a normal part of their everyday lives and they enjoy it. They will reap the benefits of it at the time and for the rest of their lives.

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