

Get Your Children Moving ~ at All Ages

Parent Central Express is the monthly e-newsletter of [Parent Central](#), a program dedicated to helping parents access information on children's issues and resources on parenting. Parent Central is a program of the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA).

Physical activity is an important part of children's healthy growth and development. Research suggests that toddlers need 30 minutes of structured physical activities everyday, and then an additional 60 minutes of free playtime.

Being active at a young age can help children stay fit for life! Children who are active develop stronger muscles and bones, and are less likely to develop health problems such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and other conditions later in life. Being active can also help children maintain a stable mood and sleep better.

Staying active is not just for children. Exercise helps adults maintain a healthy weight, and it can also help you stay in a better mood, sleep better, and combat some chronic diseases, such as heart disease. The Centers for Disease Control recommends adults participate in moderate physical activity (like walking) for 30 minutes at least five days a week.

Parents can set a good example for children by exercising regularly--and make it a family time activity as well. If you gotta move, you might as well have fun doing it. Here are some suggested outdoor and inside activities to try with your young children:

Outdoor Activities

Infants

The Stroller-Walk: Your infant won't get as much activity from this as you will, but it is worth it to take your baby for a stroller walk to take in the outdoor sights, smells and sounds. The faster and longer you walk, the better it is for you. Another great way to walk with your baby is to use a baby carrier or sling.

Sandbox Diggers: If your baby can sit up on his own, take him to a playground that has a sandbox where you can both dig and play around in the sand. Taking some toys such as a truck with an open back and a shovel can make sand play even more fun.

Toddlers

Catch: Rolling or kicking a large ball is a good way to be active for both of you. Toddlers love to run after big balls or play with it rolling back and forth to you.

Gardening: Dig in the dirt with your toddler, either in your own yard or a community garden. You can plant flowers, but the digging, carrying plants and all the equipment that go with it are really what gives your arms and leg a workout.

Preschoolers

Ball: Balls are great ways to exercise large muscles and get the heart pumping. Try playing soccer with your preschooler. Set up goal areas in whatever outdoor space you can find by using old milk cartons or use cardboard boxes. Kick the ball from one end of your area to the other.

Jumping Rope: Jumping rope is great way to help your preschooler exercise and develop coordination. Learn some jump rope rhymes and share them with your child.

Indoor Exercise

Infants

Kicking and Moving: Put your baby on the floor on her back, and hold a soft object (like a stuffed animal) that she can kick. Act excited when she does. Give your baby a rattle or other noisemaker that he can shake. Babies love it when they can make things happen.

Patty-Cake: Your baby might not yet know the words. But, clapping hands and playing patty-cake gives him a chance to get moving.

Toddlers

Moving Like Animals: Call out names of zoo and farm animals. Once you have said the name, your toddler (and you!) should move the way the animal does, and make noises like the animal. It will be fun and help your young one use some energy.

Dancing: Everyone can dance. Play your toddler's favorite music or yours - anything with a good beat - and dance together. Don't be afraid to get into the music - the more you move around, the better!

Preschoolers

Cleaning the House: Preschoolers love to help with chores. Take advantage before this interest before it quickly disappears. Chores such as setting the table, light dusting, picking up toys or sweeping are great ways to keep your child active. Put on some music to make the work more fun.

Stretching Out: Work on your flexibility (touching your toes, doing arm circles, jumping jacks) and help your child learn how to exercise healthfully by stretching together.