

Exercise (Physical Activity) and Children

AHA Scientific Position

Physical inactivity is a major risk factor for developing coronary artery disease. It also increases the risk of stroke and such other major cardiovascular risk factors as obesity, high blood pressure, low HDL ("good") cholesterol and diabetes. The American Heart Association recommends that children and adolescents participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day.

Why is exercise or physical activity important for my child?

Increased physical activity has been associated with an increased life expectancy and decreased risk of cardiovascular disease. Physical activity produces overall physical, psychological and social benefits. Inactive children are likely to become inactive adults. And physical activity helps with

- controlling weight
- reducing blood pressure
- raising HDL ("good") cholesterol
- reducing the risk of diabetes and some kinds of cancer
- improved psychological well-being, including gaining more self-confidence and higher self-esteem

How do I promote physical activity in my child?

- Physical activity should be increased by reducing sedentary time (e.g., watching television, playing computer video games or talking on the phone).
- Physical activity should be fun for children and adolescents.
- Parents should try to be role models for active lifestyles and provide children with opportunities for increased physical activity.

What if my child is uncoordinated or overweight?

All children, even less-coordinated ones, need to be physically active. Activity may be particularly helpful for the physical and psychological well-being of children with a weight problem.

The American Heart Association recommends:

- All children age 2 and older should participate in at least 30 minutes of enjoyable, moderate-intensity physical activities every day that are developmentally appropriate and varied.
- If your child or children don't have a full 30-minute activity break each day, try to provide at least two 15-minute periods or three 10-minute periods in which they can engage in vigorous activities appropriate to their age, gender and stage of physical and emotional development.

How to Get Non-Athletes to be Physically Active

Team sports are a great way for kids to get their daily activity requirement, but competitive sports aren't for everyone. Here are some ways to encourage your "non-athlete" to get up and get moving.

- Some kids are embarrassed to participate in sports because they don't think they're good enough. If this is the problem, find time to practice together. This may help build confidence.
- Some kids just don't like competing in sports. That's OK; there are lots of other ways to be active. Examples are swimming, horseback riding, dancing, cycling, skateboarding, yoga, walking, etc. Find out your child's interests.
- Don't make exercise a punishment. Forcing your child to go out and play may increase resentment and resistance. Try using physical activity to counter something your child doesn't want to do. For instance, make it the routine that your child can ride a bike for 30 minutes before starting homework after school. Your child will beg for 20 more minutes outside just to put off the homework!



How to Limit Tube Time and Get Your Kids Moving

Experts recommend that kids get no more than 1–2 hours of TV/computer/video games a day — most kids get 4–6 hours. You know your child needs to watch less TV but you're dreading the screaming, yelling and crying that may follow. First and foremost, remember YOU are the parent. You run the show; part of your job is to set limits. Here are some ideas about how to limit your kid's sedentary time.



- Have a plan. Be prepared to offer alternative activities to TV or video games. You might consider family game night, shooting some hoops, walking the dog or exploring a nearby park.
- Be active with your kids. Experts say that what kids want more than anything else is time with their parents. To give them that, don't just send them out to play — go play with them!
- Don't position your furniture so the TV is the main focus of the room. Remove televisions from bedrooms.
- Plan TV watching in advance. Go through the TV guide and pick the shows you want to watch. Turn the TV on for those shows and turn it off afterwards. Don't just watch whatever comes on next.
- Avoid using TV as a reward or punishment.
- Practice what you preach. Your kids won't accept being restricted to two hours of TV watching if you can veg out for four hours. The best way to influence your kids' behavior is through example.

Remember, you can do it! Be strong, have a plan and don't back down. Your child's health is worth fighting for.

Did you know that by participating in Jump Rope For Heart you're helping to save lives?

Jump Rope For Heart is a national educational fund-raising program that is sponsored by the American Heart Association and the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD).

Jump Rope For Heart engages elementary students in jumping rope while raising funds to support lifesaving heart and stroke research. Students ask friends and family for donations and receive thank-you gifts based on the dollars they raise. This educational program teaches physical fitness and promotes the value of community service to students and their families. It shows students that they can contribute to their community's welfare.