

Get Fit, Stay Healthy

Any type of regular physical activity can improve your fitness and your health—even walking, taking the stairs, or mowing the lawn. The most important thing is that you keep moving!

Benefits of Physical Activity

Being physically active can help

- **Keep you at a healthy weight.** Keep in mind that each person's healthy weight is different—it depends on your height and body size. Ask your pediatrician what a healthy weight is for you.
- **Prevent heart disease.** Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States. Research has shown that the risk factors for heart disease start during childhood. A lack of physical activity is one of the major risk factors for heart disease.
- **Strengthen your bones.** Regular exercise keeps bones healthy and can help prevent a bone disease called *osteoporosis*. This disease is common in older people and causes bones to break easily.
- **Reduce stress.** We all have stress, but learning to cope with it is an important way to stay healthy. Many things can cause stress, like problems with parents or friends or the pressures of school. Changes in life, like moving to a new home or breaking up with someone, can also cause stress. Exercise can help you relax and helps your body handle stress.

Types of Fitness

To be fit, you might find it helpful to work on all aspects of fitness, including

- **Aerobic endurance.** This is how well your heart, lungs, and blood vessels provide oxygen and nutrients throughout your body. When you exercise, you breathe harder and your heart beats faster. These changes help your body get the oxygen it needs. If you are not fit, your heart and lungs have to work extra hard, even during everyday things, like taking the stairs. Examples of aerobic activities are basketball, running, and swimming.
- **Muscle strength and endurance.** This type of fitness is the amount of work and the amount of time that your muscles can do a certain activity before they tire. The more fit you are, the longer you can play a sport, work out, or do other activities before you have to stop.
- **Flexibility.** This is how well you can move and stretch your joints, ligaments, and muscles through a full range of motion. For example, people with good flexibility can easily bend over and touch the floor. Poor flexibility may increase the risk of getting hurt during athletic and everyday activities.

Get Fit

Physical activity should be a regular part of your day, like brushing your teeth, eating, and sleeping. It can be done in gym class, on a sports team, or as a workout on your own.

- **Stay positive and have fun.** A good mental attitude is important. Find an activity you enjoy. You are more likely to keep with it if you choose something you like. Ask a friend or family member to join you.
- **Take fitness one step at a time.** Small changes can add up to better fitness. For example, walk or ride your bike or use the stairs when you can.

- **Get your heart pumping.** Make sure your physical activity includes aerobic activity.
- **Remember to warm up.** Do some easy exercises or mild active stretching before you do any physical activity. This warms your muscles up and may help protect against injury. Stretching also makes your muscles and joints more flexible. Finally, it is important to stretch after you exercise, to cool down your muscles.

A Healthy Lifestyle

In addition to physical activity, here are some other ways to live a healthy lifestyle.

- Spend less time in front of a screen, like your cell phone, TV, or computer or video games. Or do some exercises while watching a video, movie, or TV show.
- Eat 3 healthy meals a day, including at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables and 4 servings of low-fat dairy products.
- Make sure you drink plenty of fluids before, during, and after any exercise. Water is best.
- Stop drinking sweetened beverages, including sports beverages, or drink fewer of them.
- Eat less junk food and fast food. (Often they're full of unhealthy fats, carbohydrates, salt, and sugar.)
- Get 9 to 10 hours of sleep every night.
- Don't use tobacco products (like cigarettes and e-cigarettes), drink alcohol, or use illicit drugs.

For More Information

American Academy of Pediatrics

www.aap.org and www.HealthyChildren.org

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