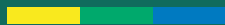


Active Community

NSW Department of Sport and Recreation
Active Community Guide

Active Kids



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What is physical activity?

Physical activity is a term that describes any movement involving large muscles. Running, walking, swimming and playing sport are all examples of physical activity.



Why should kids be physically active?

Physically active people live longer, have better managed weight, lower blood pressure, healthier cholesterol levels, are less likely to have a heart attack or stroke, have reduced risk of developing diabetes and some cancers, feel more energetic, have stronger bones and muscles, feel more confident and happy and are able to sleep better.

Physical activity behaviour patterns are established early in life. There is evidence that active children are more likely to become active adults.

Active kids become active adults.

In addition to setting the foundation for a healthy adulthood, children who are active perform better at school, improve their ability to concentrate, develop good social skills, develop good co-ordination, manage stress and anxiety, have more stamina and have improved self-esteem.

Most forms of physical activity are great fun and are a way for children to meet new friends. Many physical activities require co-operation and teamwork and many also involve a challenge and the opportunity to achieve.

Active kids are happy and healthy kids.



How much physical activity should kids be doing?

Any physical activity is better than none – and generally the more the better. Children should be active every day in as many ways as they can.

International experts recommend that all young people should participate in physical activity of at least moderate intensity for one hour each day. Young people can get additional benefit from more vigorous activity lasting at least 20 minutes on three or more occasions a week.

Encourage kids to be active every day in lots of different ways.

Overweight children – a growing concern

Over the 10 years from 1985 to 1995 the prevalence of overweight children almost doubled, while that of obesity more than tripled. 21% of boys and 23% of girls in Australia are now considered overweight or obese. These statistics are both dramatic and disturbing.



The longer a child stays overweight the more likely they are to become an overweight adult with increased risk of health problems such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and some forms of cancer.

Part of the obesity problem is linked to children not being active. Australian children now watch an average of 20–30 hours of television each week. Other passive activities competing for children's time are computer games, videos, homework, additional tutoring and the internet. Studies show that children who watch television more than four hours a day are more likely to be overweight. On the other hand, children who are involved in a team sport or other regular physical activities are less likely to be overweight. There are a number of other potent forces promoting the development of obesity among Australian children, such as:

- increased use of cars,
- the ready availability of energy dense foods and foods with a high fat content,
- perceptions that local communities are unsafe because of child safety and pedestrian safety concerns, and
- changes in family structures and work patterns – many parents have less time to spend with their children.

By encouraging children to be physically active and monitoring the types of foods children eat, parents can help their overweight children lose weight and remain healthy.

Almost 1 in 5 Australian children are overweight or obese.



What can parents do to help?

There are lots of things parents can do to get their kids active.

- Help children understand and appreciate the way the body works and how to recognise the body's needs
- Limit the amount of time children spend watching television and using the computer
- Any changes should focus on activity for everyone – activity needs to be part of a family lifestyle
- Keep it fun – if children enjoy being active in the early years they are more likely to remain active later on
- Be a good role model – be active yourself
- Help children find activities that they enjoy
- Encourage children to join a sporting club
- If school is within walking distance, walk instead of driving children to school. Walking to school also gives you time to talk to your kids
- When you choose presents for children, look for things that encourage them to be active such as frisbees, balls, kites or outdoor play equipment
- Plan family events that are active such as a bushwalk, kite flying or a family cricket match
- Encourage your child's school to place a high priority on sport and physical education

Make activity part of a family lifestyle.



Children should try a variety of activities

Some parents encourage their children to concentrate on developing skills in one sport in the hope that they might become a future champion in that sport. There is evidence that children are better off trying a variety of sports and engaging in unstructured free play that promotes spontaneity and creativity. It is better for children to develop a range of skills so they can perform a variety of different activities with efficiency, strength and power before focusing on a specific sport. This will help children avoid repetitive strain injuries and they will be much stronger and more injury resistant in the long term.

Always remember that physical activity should be something children enjoy – too many children are turned off sport and physical activity because of relentless adult pressure on them to perform.

Resist the temptation to specialise in one sport too early.



Active kids at different ages

0–2 years: encourage active play

- Let your toddler be active and play with them

3–5 years: teach basic movement skills

- At this age children are learning about their bodies and how to control them. Children learn these skills through play and movement games
- Teach your child basic skills such as running, jumping and sliding. Make sure you teach the skills through fun games your child will enjoy
- Obstacle courses are great fun for children of all ages. You can make obstacle courses indoors and outdoors using everyday objects such as cardboard boxes, pillows, laundry baskets, chairs, trees or the garden hose
- Limit time spent watching television

6–8 years: build on basic skills

- Give children the opportunity to experiment and explore, to find out what they can and can't do
- Allow children to make mistakes and learn from them
- Teach your child throwing, catching, striking and kicking skills through fun games. Make sure you use equipment appropriate to your child's age and ability



- Encourage participation in organised sport – make sure it is a modified version of the sport suitable for your child's age and ability
- Use walking as transport whenever possible
- Limit time spent watching television and using the computer

9–12 years: refine skills

- Encourage participation in organised sport – resist the temptation to specialise in one sport
- Discuss your child's interests and let them choose activities they enjoy the most
- Help your child master more advanced skills like the overarm throw, dribbling with the feet, catching using one hand, continuous bouncing using one hand and catching in a distracting environment
- Encourage safe cycling and walking as transport
- Limit time spent watching television and using the computer

13–16 years: encourage participation

- Enjoyment of physical activity is the key to life long participation
- Help your teenager find a balance between study, family obligations, time with friends and physical activity
- Try a variety of other activities with your teenager such as bike riding, roller blading or jogging
- Encourage your teenager to continue activities they enjoy
- Involve your teenager in decisions about their activities
- Your teenager might enjoy helping organise a sport they are involved in by becoming an umpire or coach of a team



Promoting a healthy diet

Many children in Australia do not have a healthy diet. Physical activity and dietary intake are highly linked to each other. To maintain a healthy body weight, regular physical activity must be accompanied by a healthy and balanced diet. The right food will provide children with the fuel they need to lead an active life.

Eating a variety of foods from the main food groups and choosing healthy commercial products that are high in fibre, low in fat and low in sugar form the basis of good eating. This means eating plenty of fresh vegetables and fruits, lots of bread, rice, pasta and other grain products, along with reduced fat dairy products, fish, lean meat and poultry.

Remember these hints:

- Eat regular meals
- Eat slowly and chew food well
- Enjoy the taste of different foods
- Drinks lots of water
- Eat at the table and not while watching television
- Have only healthy snacks on hand
- Plan your shopping list around healthy meals
- Have treats occasionally

For more information about a healthy diet talk to your general practitioner (GP).



Meet Liam (4) and Jett (2)



'Liam and Jett are real water babies', said their mum Kerry. 'Both of them are quite confident under supervision in the water and now we have a real battle getting them out of the water. But it didn't just happen – we wanted our kids to feel confident and have fun in the water because my husband Dave and I have enjoyed being around the water all our lives. We both played water polo for many years and Dave previously worked as a lifeguard.'

'From a very young age, we introduced our children to the water. The key is to do it regularly and make it fun. We always spend time playing in the water with the kids and we encourage them to bring their toys with them to the pool or beach. We bought them tiny wetsuits because kids often feel the cold in the water and this is one reason they want to get out. We never force them to do things that scare them – we wait until they ask us to take them out deeper at the beach or take them for a ride on a surfboard with one of us.'

'If parents are scared of the water themselves this rubs off on their children. But if parents are confident and enjoy being in aquatic environments so will their children.'

'We have so much fun as a family playing in the pool, swimming and surfing at the beach, camping, fishing and going on canoe adventures. Helping our kids develop basic water confidence and swimming skills has opened up a world of enjoyment to them.'



Meet Andrew (8)



'For as long as I can remember I have played cricket in the backyard with my big brother James and my Uncle Rob. When James was seven and I was four Mum asked if we wanted to join a cricket club and play on Saturdays. I really love cricket. I've got heaps of friends at cricket and we sometimes stay at each other's houses and we always invite each other to our birthday parties, where we usually end up playing a big game of backyard cricket.'

'Andrew has gained so much from playing cricket', says his mum Carmel. 'He has a whole new group of friends and it has given him the opportunity and confidence to make friends outside of school. At this age they play modified rules. This is really important to keep them interested and to give them the opportunity to be successful.'

'Through cricket, Andrew has learnt that to achieve at something it takes practice, patience and perseverance. These are very good lessons for him to take with him throughout his life. He has learnt how to be a good sport and how to fit into a team. Although he is disappointed when he doesn't do well or when his team loses, he knows it is not the end of the world and there is always next week. Cricket has given Andrew a lot of self-confidence and we will encourage him to keep playing cricket for as long as he enjoys it.'



Meet Stephanie (14)



'I first started playing sport in primary school. My favourite sport was netball and I joined the primary school netball team. I started high school last year and joined the high school netball team. Last year I was picked in a representative team that plays against other schools in our district.

'Last year I also started playing touch football in a competition which is played against other schools in the afternoon.

'Since I was little I've always played sport in the backyard with my brother and sisters. We still have massive games of backyard cricket with all our friends.

'I want to keep playing sport after I leave school so one day soon I'll probably join a local netball club.

'Playing sport has made me very fit and healthy. As well as playing netball and touch, I sometimes go for a run with our dog or go swimming.

'Some of my friends have started dropping out of sport to spend time doing other things like going to the beach, shopping or meeting boys. I don't see why you can't still play sport and do these things. I'm enjoying playing sport too much to stop playing now.'



Meet Saumala (9)



'I started looking for an after school activity for Saumala initially as an outlet for her unlimited energy', said Saumala's big sister Sauntharya.

'It's not easy to find appropriate sports programs for young people with a disability. Luckily we found a sporting organisation that offered both swimming and gymnastics, two sports that Saumala was interested in trying.

'Since Saumala started attending swimming and gymnastics classes I have noticed a lot of changes in her. Her movement skills and flexibility have both greatly improved. She gets better at both activities all the time and I think she feels more confident in her abilities now.

'Saumala and I have both made new friends through the sporting club. I have recently become involved with the club as a volunteer and enjoy helping out in the office when my uni schedule permits.

'We are both planning a long association with Saumala's club and hope that she will begin to compete in the Special Olympics competitions next year.'



If you need help finding out about activities available in your local area phone 13 13 02 or search the Active Search online directory at www.dsr.nsw.gov.au

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