



Sit Less, Be More Healthy... for Kids, Too

Even though children don't tend to develop chronic diseases, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, or osteoporosis, the risk factors begin to develop early in life. Performing regular physical activity or exercise can prevent these risk factors from showing up and help children be healthier overall. Just as it does for adults, exercise improves a child's body composition, bone health, metabolic health markers, and heart, lung and muscular fitness. As well, children who get enough physical activity tend to show reduced symptoms of depression. Despite the numerous health benefits for kids, many do not do the recommended amount of activity and are spending more time sitting.

According to the [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#), children and adolescents should do at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day. The hour of exercise should include moderately intense or vigorous aerobic physical activity, as well as muscle-strengthening and bone-strengthening. Aerobic exercises, which help to increase the fitness of the heart and lungs, include running, hopping, jumping rope, swimming, dancing, and bicycling. For adolescents and teenagers, muscle-strengthening exercises can include lifting weights or working with resistance bands, while younger kids can become stronger through playing on playground equipment, climbing trees, and playing tug-of-war. Many of these exercises create an impact with the ground and that force promotes bone growth and makes bones stronger. Activities like running, jumping rope, basketball and hopscotch all help strengthen bones.

Of course, children learn what is important by watching their parents and other care givers. Therefore, you can encourage your children to be more active by being active yourself and engaging in physical activities with them. Some options are to take a family walk around the neighborhood in the afternoon or evening, play a family game of tag, or go on a bike ride together during the weekend. If the weather is bad or there isn't a safe place to participate in outdoor activities, you can be active at home by having a family dance party, playing a fast-paced game of Simon Says or walking up and down the stairs in your building. Although it is not as much fun, doing chores around the home also counts toward activity and helps children to burn calories while learning responsibility.

There are lots of ways your child can meet the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity every day. By working together to meet this goal and being creative, you will strengthen your relationship while helping everyone in the family to be healthy and fit.

Note: as with all physical activity, be sure the exercises are appropriate for the person's age and any medical conditions the person may have.