

Kids Fitness and Development:

Kids ages 4-6

By the time kids have reached ages 4-6, they have mastered many of their basic movement skills such as running and jumping. For your child's development, it is important to provide activities that will help them refine and build on the basics to learn more complex tasks. Children at this age have a natural tendency to be active, so take advantage of that by fostering healthy habits of working out, eating healthy, and having fun! The National Association for Sports and Physical Education recommendations on physical activity for children ages 4-6 are as follows:

Get at least 60 minutes of structured physical activity

Get at least 60 minutes of unstructured physical activity

Avoid periods of inactivity of 1 hour or more

Kids ages 6-12:

At this age, children need physical activities to build strength, coordination, confidence, and self-esteem. Through physical activities, kids can learn about setting goals, meeting challenges, sportsmanship, teamwork, and the value of practice. Kids between the ages of 6-8 are sharpening their basic physical skills like jumping, throwing, kicking, and catching. Kids between the ages of 9-12 are refining, improving, and coordinating their skills. The National Association for Sports and Physical Education recommendations on physical activity for children ages 6-12 are as follows:

Get 60 minutes or more of physical activity every day!

Stay active: break down activities into 15 minutes or more throughout the day

Avoid periods of inactivity of 2 hours or more

Fitness at home:

There are many ways you can keep your kids moving at home. Such activities include:

- Incorporate physical activity into the daily routine, from household chores to an after dinner walk.
- Allow enough time for free play! Kids can burn more calories and have more fun when left to their own devices, such as playing tag or riding their bikes around the neighborhood.
- Be active together. It will get you moving and kids love to play with their parents
- **Limit time spent in sedentary activities**, such as watching TV, going online, and playing video games

Some good idea for physical activities for children are: going on walks, running in the backyard, using playground equipment at your local park, games such as duck, duck, goose, follow the leader, freeze dance or freeze tag. Also a great activity which improves balance is pretending you are a statue. For some activities that can take place indoors is a treasure hunt: hide "treasures" throughout the house and provide clues of where they might be, or an obstacle course: set up an obstacle course with chairs, boxes, and tours for the kids to go over, under, and around.

The many benefits of Exercise:

- Builds stronger muscles and bones
- Promotes a leaner body because exercise helps control body fat
- Less likely to become overweight
- Decreases the risk of developing type 2 diabetes
- Possible effect of lowering blood pressure and blood cholesterol levels
- Promotes mental health: Kids have a better outlook on life

In addition to the health benefits of regular exercise, kids who are physically fit sleep better and are better able to handle the physical and emotional challenges that a typical day presents.

The Three Elements of Fitness

Three elements which are fundamental for active children:

- **Endurance:** Tag; running away from the kid that is “it”
- **Strength:** Using the monkey bars
- **Flexibility:** Bending down to tie his/her shoes

Endurance: is developed when someone regularly engages in aerobic activity. Aerobic activities cause the heart to beat faster and a person to breathe harder. When this is done regularly, aerobic activity strengthens the heart and improves the body’s ability to deliver oxygen to all the cells. With better oxygen transport, kids will feel more energized and have a better outlook on life (“runners high”; a natural body high which is caused from chemicals that are released from the brain during exercise. Can last up to 4 hours post - exercise)

Strength: is developed when someone performs a muscle contraction which challenges that muscle to work. Lifting weights is not the only way to gain strength, such exercises which are great for improving strength in children are push-ups, stomach crunches, pull-ups, climbing, and even handstands. By building muscular strength, the body will burn more calories to ‘feed’ the new muscles as well as utilization of better energy sources (i.e. using stored fat and converting it into usable energy).

Flexibility: allows for muscles and joints to bend and move easier through their full range of motion. Flexibility also is important in injury prevention. Children who are not flexible and partake in physical activities are more likely to develop a muscular or ligamentous injury than that of a child who is flexible. During physical activities, the body is placed in vulnerable positions which may require the elongation of muscles; individuals who are not flexible may experience strains because their muscles are not adapted to being stressed in those positions.

Some interesting facts: According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the average child is watching about 3 hours of television a day.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, the average kid spends 5 ½ hours on all media combined a day.

Understanding the food pyramid:

The Food Guide Pyramid is designed to help kids and their parents to understand the guidelines. Inside the pyramid, six stripes represent the five food groups as well as a small section for fats and oils. Stairs on the pyramid represent the importance of exercise. On the pyramid, each color represents a different food group:

- Orange: Grains
- Green: Vegetables
- Red: Fruit
- Blue: Dairy and calcium-rich foods
- Purple: Proteins (meat, beans, and fish)
- Yellow: Fats and Oils

Grains: Includes foods like bread, cereal, rice, and pasta, should provide the majority of the energy a child needs each day. The best kinds of grains are complex carbohydrates, such as whole grain foods. Whole grains have a good amount of fiber which is important for good digestive function and removal of toxins within the body as well as protect against diseases like heart disease and diabetes. Whole grains also take longer to break down which is beneficial because the body is supplied a slow but constant energy source. How to measure the amount of grains consumed in one day: 1 slice of bread, ½ cup of cooked rice, pasta, or oatmeal are all 1 ounce.

Vegetables: Provide many of the vitamins and minerals kids need for good health, and they provide fiber to aid digestion. There are all different kinds of vegetables which have all offer different kinds of vitamins, so it is important to give a variety of vegetables to your kids.

Fruits: Especially good sources of important vitamins like A and C. This food group also adds minerals such as potassium and fiber which is important to normal cellular function within the body.

Dairy: This food group, such as milk, yogurt, and cheese provide important sources of vitamin A and D, calcium, and protein. Vitamin A helps build healthy eyes, skin, and hair. Vitamin D helps children's body absorb calcium and use it for healthy bones and teeth as well as improving muscle and nerve functions.

Meat, Beans, Fish, and Nuts: This group provides children with protein, which helps the body maintain and repair body tissues and build strong muscles. Foods in this group also provide vitamin B-complex and iron which help build strong bones and teeth while also supporting muscle function.

Fats, Oils, and Sweets: Good fats vs. Bad Fats

Some fats and oils are important for vitamin absorption in the body. Vitamins that are fat dependant for absorption are vitamin A, D, E, K, and beta-carotene. There are some foods which are naturally high in oils, such as nuts, olives, some fish, and avocados.

There oils however tend to be either high in monounsaturated or polyunsaturated fats. These fats raise the level of (good) HDL cholesterol, which seems to help prevent heart problems, and do not raise levels of (bad) LDL cholesterol, which can cause heart problems. On the other hand, solid fats like butter/margarine contain more saturated fats or trans fats, which can raise the (bad) LDL cholesterol levels in the blood and increase a child's risk for developing heart disease.

Chart as to how much a child should be consuming each day per good group:

	Grains	Vegetables	Fruits	Diary	Meats, beans, fish
2-3 yo	3 ounces	1 cup	1 cup	2 cups	2 ounces
4-8 yo	4-5 ounces	1 ½ cups	1 ½ cups	2 cups	3-4 ounces
9-13 girls	5 ounces	2 cups	1 ½ cups	3 cups	5 ounces
9-13 boys	6 ounces	2 ½ cups	1 ½ cups	3 cups	5 ounces