

## Supporting Childhood Physical Health: A Guide for Families



### The Importance of Exercise

All children should engage in at least one hour of physical activity daily and should not be still for more than 60 minutes at a time.

To support physical activity, families should:

- provide a space where children can safely run and play with toys and equipment (75 square feet is adequate);
- provide a space for riding tricycles, running, and rolling balls;
- purchase balls and toys with wheels that can keep a child active;
- plan activities that promote perceptual motor development, the ability to interact with one's environment by using one's senses; and
- have children dance to nursery rhymes or chants to help them develop rhythm.



### Benefits of Exercise

- Supports development of children's fundamental motor skills including: walking; throwing; kicking; running; balancing; hopping; and skipping.
- In addition to helping a child move better, physical activity helps their bodies maintain a healthy body weight and build healthy bones, muscles, heart, and lungs.
- Fights off depression, anger, and anxiety at early stages.
- Sparks creativity and problem solving.

## The Importance of Nutrition

Making healthy food and nutrition choices is a challenge for not only adults, but for children too.

A balanced meal can help reduce the risk of many health conditions such as:

- high blood pressure;
- obesity;
- diabetes; and
- cardiovascular diseases.

Fresh foods like fruits and vegetables are nutritious options, and a great source of fiber.

Children's fruit/vegetable intake per meal should be as follows:

- Two- to Three-Years-Old
  - One cup of vegetables and one cup of fruit daily.
- Four- to Eight-Years-Old
  - One and a half cups of vegetables with each meal, and one and a half cups of fruit daily.
- Nine-Years-Old and Older
  - Two cups of vegetables with each meal, and one and a half cups of fruit daily.

TIP: Smoothies can be fun to make with children. They love to watch whole fruits being crushed up to make juice!

## Benefits of Nutritious Food

- Helps children's digestive and immune systems stay healthy.
- Provides a good source of vitamins.
- Helps to fight infections.
- Makes wonderful snacks that can be easily packed.

## Strategies for A Healthy Routine

Create a schedule that includes time to be active throughout the day.

- Dance
  - A creative and fun way to keep the body moving, get the heart rate up, and promote good blood flow.
- Tag
  - One game that can help promote movement in a fun and fast-paced way.
- Scavenger Hunt
  - A creative way to get children up and moving. This can be done inside or outside. This is a great way to promote exploratory play with younger children.
- Games
  - It's important to incorporate rules with some games, and to vaguely give directions for others. This helps children learn how to create their own rules which enhances their thinking abilities.
  - Some rules: you can only hop during tag; no tagging the person who tagged you; freeze once you're tagged, etc.
- Meal Planning
  - Create a meal menu. This helps to not only save money, but helps to keep track of the things one is eating.
  - Allow children to help season food, sort food by type or color, and even taste the vegetables before they are cooked. Some children like raw veggies as snacks.

TIP: When making a schedule to support a healthy routine, try to block off time for activities that can be done in a 60 minute timeframe.

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## Acknowledgements

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Developmentally Appropriate Parenting is a family resource content series developed by Trying Together as an effort to empower caregivers to create high-quality experiences at the earliest stages of their child's life.

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