

## Physical Activity for Children

The rate of childhood obesity is increasing at an alarming rate, doubling over the past 30 years. Obesity and cardiovascular disease risks are directly related. Because of obesity, we now have a generation of people who may not outlive their parents\*.

Approximately one out of eight high school students in South Carolina is overweight\*\*. An overweight adolescent has a 70% chance of becoming an overweight or obese adult. Obese children may also experience exclusion from social groups and low self-esteem.

Almost half of adolescents in South Carolina do not meet the minimum recommendations for adequate physical activity\*\*. Physical activity and healthy eating are keys to preventing and treating obesity. Sedentary activities such as watching TV, playing video games and computer use have replaced good old fashioned outdoor playing—riding bikes, jumping rope, playing ball and skating. Inactivity, along with more snacking on high calorie foods has led to the epidemic of childhood obesity.

\*The Obesity Epidemic

\*\*Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBSS), 1999

### Benefits of Physical Activity

- helps release “feel good” hormones, which can help reduce anxiety and stress, improve mood, and promote relaxation.
- promotes a positive self-image.
- helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints.
- helps manage weight, build lean muscle and reduce fat.
- increases cardio-respiratory (aerobic) fitness.
- enhances flexibility and posture.

- prevents or delays the development of high blood pressure and helps reduce blood pressure in some adolescents with hypertension.
- encourages socialization through organized group activities.



### How Much is Needed?

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that children and teens be physically active for at least 60 minutes on most days, if not every day. Combined with eating right, this level of physical activity can help them stay at a healthy weight and prevent gradual weight gain over time.

It's the total amount of physical activity per day that matters. The recommended 60 minutes can be done all at once or broken up into shorter sessions, such as 15-minute intervals.

All kids benefit from regular physical activity, regardless of their ability, shape and size. There should be a good balance of activities that stretch, strengthen, and give the heart a workout.

Physical activity can be fun! Kids should choose activities that they enjoy. An activity does not have to be strenuous to be helpful. Kids will have more energy, plus they can enjoy being with other people while they are active. How great is that?

Kids can be creative and find a variety of ways to stay active. These three types of physical activities should be combined:



**Weight-Bearing and Strength Building:** Kids need to get up and move! This can be done through walking, wiggling, dancing, riding a bike, climbing the stairs. Kids should just keep moving whenever they can. Regular weight-bearing exercise (e.g. walking, jogging), along with a calcium-rich diet, helps to develop and maintain strong healthy bones.



**Aerobic:** Kids should do more intense activities that warm them up and make them glow! They can swim, run, play volleyball and basketball, roller blade, or rope climb. These are a few activities that give kids an aerobic workout and strengthen their heart and lungs.



**Balance & Stretching:** Spending more time on strengthening and stretching activities is important for kids. They can touch their toes, do sit-ups, push-ups, pull-ups, martial arts and dance. These keep their muscles firm and their body flexible, which reduces risk of injury.

Kids do not need to change overnight how they exercise and what they eat. They can just start with one new, good change, and add another one every day or so.

Kids should begin physical activity slowly, then gradually build to higher levels. This reduces the risk of injury and the feeling of defeat from setting unrealistic goals.

## Children Ages 6-11

Kids should move more and have fun while they move. They need to aim for at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity every day, or most days.



The new *MyPyramid for Kids* tells kids ages 6-11 to be physically active every day, or most days, and to make healthy food choices. The girl climbing the stairs is a reminder to do something active every day, like running, walking the dog, playing, swimming, biking, or climbing lots of stairs. For more information, go to <http://www.mypyramid.gov/kids/>

Children who have positive experiences with physical activity at a young age are more likely to be regularly active throughout life. In general, children can start participating in team sports at age six, because they begin to understand teamwork at this age, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. Children naturally start to do things in groups about eight to 10 years of age.

## Teens

Like younger children, teens should get at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity every day, or most days. Today's teens are busy "24/7" with school, after-school activities and perhaps a job. However, they do not always lead an active lifestyle just because they have a busy schedule.

When kids hit the teen years, physical activity drops dramatically. Almost half of young people aged 12-21 are not vigorously active on a regular basis, and about 14% report no recent physical activity. As

adolescents get older, they become less active. Females are less physically active than males, and black females are less active than white females.

Anything that gets their bodies moving counts! Teens should choose an activity that interests them—bicycling, in-line skating, swimming, family walks after dinner (also a sharing time), karate, kick-boxing, dancing, or hiking.

High school students' enrollment in daily physical education classes dropped from 42% in 1991 to 28% in 2003. Well designed school-based interventions have been effective in increasing physical activity in PE classes. Social support from family and friends has a positive impact, also.

By getting involved in an athletic program, teens can burn energy, meet new friends, and learn teamwork and leadership skills. Regular physical activity improves strength, builds lean muscle, and decreases body fat. In addition, it can build stronger bones to last a lifetime.

## TV Time



Every day, on average, eight to 18-year-olds spend:

- almost four hours watching TV, videos, DVDs, and prerecorded shows
- more than an hour on the computer
- about 50 minutes playing video games

Two-thirds of young people have a TV, as well as a game player, in their bedroom. Nearly one-third have a computer in their bedroom. They spend about 1½ more hours a day watching TV than kids without a set in their room.

**Limit TV Time:** The amount of time spent watching TV is the most powerful behavioral predictor of obesity. The risk of obesity increases by 25% for every two hours of TV viewed daily.

As a family, make an agreement to limit TV/DVD/video watching or gaming to two hours or less per day. The TV should be removed from a child's bedroom. Turn off Saturday morning

cartoons and go bicycling to the park or the library. Play with a ball instead of a video game. Play outside with the dog for 20 or 30 minutes in the afternoons.

**TV-Turnoff Week:** Millions of people all over the world have participated in TV-Turnoff Week since this observance began in 1995. Turning off the television is a chance to think, read, create, connect with our families and get involved in our communities. To learn more, visit TV Turnoff Network:

[www.turnoffyourtv.com/turnoffweek/TV.turnoff.week.html](http://www.turnoffyourtv.com/turnoffweek/TV.turnoff.week.html)

**TV Time Activities:** If you do watch TV, make that time more active and figure out ways to get your heart pumping. Exercise to a favorite tape or DVD. Children and parents can have a contest to see who can do the most push-ups or jumping jacks during a commercial break.

## Exercise Ideas for the Family

1. Take the President's Challenge as a family. Track your individual physical activities together and earn awards for active lifestyles at [www.presidentschallenge.org/](http://www.presidentschallenge.org/)
2. Establish a routine. Set aside time each day as activity time—walk, jog, skate, cycle, or swim. Adults need at least 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week; children 60 minutes every day, or most days.
3. Have an activity party. Center the next birthday party on physical activity. Try backyard Olympics or relay races. Have a bowling or skating party.
4. Set up a home gym. Use canned foods or other household items as weights. Stairs can substitute for stair machines.
5. Move it! When you talk on the phone, lift weights or walk around. Instead of sitting through TV commercials, get up and move. Remember to limit TV watching and computer time.
6. Give activity gifts—active games or sports equipment, which encourages physical activity.

## What Parents Can Do

To encourage your children to be more physically active:

- Set a positive example by being active yourself, because adults set the tone for active living in the family. Get your family to join you and have fun together. Train with your child to run a 5K race or participate in a walk.
- Make physical activity part of your family's daily routine.
  - Play active games together. Tumble in the leaves or play catch.
  - Designate time for family walks, such as after dinner. This is a sharing time, also.
  - Challenge your child to jump rope for five minutes, then you try it!
  - Get an aerobic dance or exercise tape for kids and exercise together.
- Give your children opportunities to be active. Take them places where they can be physically active, and give them active toys and equipment, such as balls, tricycles or bicycles. Let your children join a local recreation center or after-school program. Be supportive of your child's participation in physical activities, whether team sports or activities such as in-line skating, skateboarding, snowboarding, skiing, or dancing. Go to your child's sports events and cheer for them. Bring them to yours to cheer for you.
- Offer positive reinforcement when your child participates in physical activities and encouragement when they express an interest in new activities. For example, if they want to take dancing lessons, encourage and support that interest.
- Make physical activity fun and something your child enjoys. This could be a team sport, individual sport, and/or activities such as walking, running, bicycling, swimming, hiking, canoeing, playground activities, and free-time play.
- Turn special occasions into active events. Celebrate a birthday by hiking, having a Frisbee™ match, or playing volleyball.
- Keep the activity age appropriate and safe, providing protective equipment such as helmets, eye protection, mouth guards, cups, and wrist, elbow and knee pads.
- Find a convenient place to be active on a regular basis.

- Limit TV and video game time to two hours or less per day.

Always be alert to any extreme behaviors from your child—excessive dieting, over-exercising, or an unusually sedentary lifestyle at the computer or in front of the TV.

### **What Communities Can Do**

Communities play an important role in children's physical activity, also. They can support more activity among youth and families by:

- Providing quality K-12 physical education classes taught by physical education specialists, preferably every day.
- Offering physical activities that are fun, build adolescents' and young adults' confidence in their ability to be physically active, and involve friends, peers and parents.
- Providing appropriate physically active role models for youths.
- Developing and promoting the use of safe, well-maintained sidewalks, bicycle paths, trails, parks and recreation facilities.
- Allowing the use of school buildings and community facilities for safe participation in physical activity.
- Offering a variety of extracurricular programs in schools and community recreation centers for specific groups like persons with disabilities, females, low-income and ethnic minority groups.
- Encouraging health care providers to tell adolescents and young adults the reasons it is important to include physical activity in their lives.

For related information refer to [HGIC 4030, \*Physical Activity Pyramid\*](#), [HGIC 4031, \*Physical Activity for Adults\*](#), and [HGIC 4151, \*Fluid Needs\*](#).

### **Other Resources**

<http://fnic.nal.usda.gov> provides links to food and nutrition fun, games and activities, government-related sites and other resources. (USDA Food & Nutrition Information Center)

[www.bam.gov/](http://www.bam.gov/) answers 9- to 13-year-old kids' health questions about body and mind. (Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

[www.verbnow.com/](http://www.verbnow.com/) encourages kids ages 9-13 years to get physically active. (Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

[www.girlpower.gov/girlarea/bodywise/fitness/index.htm](http://www.girlpower.gov/girlarea/bodywise/fitness/index.htm) encourages and motivates 9- to 13- year-old girls to make the most of their lives. (Department of Health and Human Services)

[www.girlshealth.gov/bones/](http://www.girlshealth.gov/bones/) contains games, quizzes, and fun activities that teach girls ages 9-12 years how to be powerful and take good care of their bones. (Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women's Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

[www.4girls.gov/fitness/index.htm](http://www.4girls.gov/fitness/index.htm) (GirlsHealth.gov) contains a special section on fitness for girls, including sports for teens with disabilities. (Department of Health and Human Services, the National Women's Health Information Center)

[www.kidnetic.com/](http://www.kidnetic.com/) provides healthy eating and physical activity tips for kids and parents. (International Food Information Council Foundation)

[www.kidshealth.org/](http://www.kidshealth.org/) provides information about nutrition and fitness for kids. (Nemours Foundation)

<http://getactivestayactive.com/> encourages teens to get moving, create an online personal fitness journal, and earn awards and prizes from the President's Council. (Pepsico and the President's Challenge Physical Activity and Fitness Awards Program)

[www.fitness.gov/](http://www.fitness.gov/) is the website of The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.

[www.nyssf.org/wframeset.html](http://www.nyssf.org/wframeset.html) NYSSF is the National Youth Sports Safety Foundation, Inc., a national non-profit, educational organization dedicated to reducing the number and severity of injuries youth sustain in sports and fitness activities. This is the only organization in the country solely dedicated to this objective.

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