Exercise (Physical Activity) and Children

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Why is exercise or physical activity important for children?

- Increased physical activity has been associated with an increased life expectancy and decreased risk of cardiovascular disease.
- Physical activity produces overall physical, psychological and social benefits.
- Inactive children are likely to become inactive adults.
Physical activity helps with:

- controlling weight
- reducing blood pressure
- raising HDL ("good") cholesterol
- reducing the risk of diabetes and some kinds of cancer
- improved psychological well-being, including gaining more self-confidence and higher self-esteem
How do I promote physical activity in children?

- Physical activity should be increased by **reducing sedentary time** (e.g., watching television, playing computer video games or talking on the phone).
- Physical activity should be **fun** for children and adolescents.
- Parents should try to be **role models** for active lifestyles and provide children with opportunities for increased physical activity.
Minimum exercise recommendations:

- All children age 2 and older should participate in at least 30 minutes of enjoyable, moderate-intensity activities every day.

- They should also perform at least 30 minutes of vigorous physical activities at least 3–4 days each week to achieve and maintain a good level of cardiorespiratory fitness.
If the child does not have a full 30-minute activity break each day, try to provide at least two 15-minute periods or three 10-minute periods in which they can engage in vigorous activities.

Appropriate to their age, gender and stage of physical and emotional development

However, ideally they do more.
Exercise safely

- Make sure that protective gear is always worn such as shin pads, knee pads, mouthguards or helmets.
- Exercise should always stop if a child is in pain, feeling dizzy or faint, feels sick or very tired.
- It is best to avoid exercise, or only train very lightly, if the child is unwell, such as if the child has a cold or bronchitis.
What prevents physical activity?

- There are many activities that can take time away from exercise.
- Some of these are valued activities such as playing calm games with friends, reading, making music, doing homework.
- Some are activities that may need to be limited.
Exercise and asthma

- Most children with asthma will wheeze at least some of the time during vigorous exercise.

- It is very important not to let this get in the way of exercising, because being fit can help with asthma control.
Some children who have not been diagnosed with asthma also wheeze during exercise.

These children need to be seen by their doctor, because they may have exercise-induced asthma (EIA).

They may be able to be more active if they also use some reliever medication before exercise.
All children, even less-coordinated ones, need to be physically active.

Activity may be particularly helpful for the physical and psychological well-being of children with a weight problem.
Some young people can exercise much more than is healthy in an attempt to control their weight or appearance.

Exercising too much can cause excessive weight loss, overuse injuries and hormonal imbalances (such as preventing periods).
A sign of over-exercising can be that the exercise is getting in the way of normal activities, such as not having time to be with friends.

Another sign can be refusing to stop exercise even when the person is in pain from injuries.
What a parent can do

- Show children that you think physical activity is important by being active yourself.

- Join in active play with children.
- Take your children to playgrounds. Explore your local area for new playgrounds.

- Walk the dog if you have one.

- Encourage children to help you in the garden or give them a small garden plot of their own.
What a parent can do

- Teach your children the skills for the sports they want to play and practice with them if they enjoy this.
- Walk and cycle with children. Make sure the family has the right safety equipment.
- Plan special outdoor activities such as picnics at the beach (with swimming), a walk in a national park, ball games with children and their friends, mystery walks following a map.
What a parent can do

- Support your children's sport. Show you are interested. Help with transport to sport, and stay and watch.
- Help children think of active alternatives to try when they are bored or have been sitting too long.
- Do something active on family outings, eg walk to the cinema or the shops when you can.
- Encourage your child's school to include physical activity every day.
And Health Professionals?

- Do we ask the appropriate questions?
- Do we have time?
- Do we have the knowledge?
- Who to refer to?
Thank you

Well done Son. You've put on another inch since last week.
Some links

- http://www.mchlibrary.info/knowledgepaths/kp_phys_activity.html
- http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3007589
- http://www.fitness.gov/