

Physical Activity: How Much Is Needed?

Young Children (2 to 5 years)

Children ages two to five years should play actively, in-short bursts,¹ throughout the day to allow for proper growth and development.^{2,3} Caregivers/teachers should encourage free and structured active play that includes a variety of activities (e.g., jumping, tumbling, organized games) that are developmentally appropriate and fun for all children. Total physical activity, light, moderate or vigorous, for this age group may be as much as three hours per day.³

Children (6 years and older)

Children should engage in 60 or more minutes of at least moderate physical activity each day.² These activities should include a variety of fun, age-appropriate activities that strengthen muscles and bones (e.g., climbing and jumping). Short bursts of activity over the course of a day can accumulate to address the recommended amount of total physical activity.^{1,2}

Age-Appropriate Physical Activities

Young children strengthen their muscles by playing outside, climbing on playground structures, or participating in sports such as gymnastics. It is important for early care and education programs to promote a variety of age-appropriate physical activities for children of all ages, beginning with tummy time for infants,⁴ and for children of all abilities,^{5,6} so they can safely experience daily physical activity. Many physical activities fall into several categories (moderate- and vigorous-intensity and muscle- and bone-strengthening), making it possible for children to gain multiple health-related benefits when early care and education programs incorporate each type of activity. This may increase the chance of children sustaining physical activity into adulthood.⁷

References

1. Tucker P. The physical activity levels of preschool-aged children: a systematic review. *Early Child Res Q.* 2008;23:547–58., <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2008.08.005>. Accessed March 21, 2019.
2. United States Department of Agriculture. *Physical activity: How much is needed?* <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/physical-activity-amount>. Updated June 21st 2016. Accessed March 8, 2019.
3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*, 2nd edition. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2018. https://health.gov/paguidelines/second-edition/pdf/Physical_Activity_Guidelines_2nd_edition.pdf. Accessed March 8, 2019.



4. Hagan JF, Shaw JS, Duncan PM. *Bright Futures: Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children and Adolescents*. 4th ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2017.
5. Shields N, Synnot AJ, Barr M. Perceived barriers and facilitators to physical activity for children with disability: a systematic review. *Br J Sports Med*. 2012 Nov;46(14):989-97. doi: 10.1136/bjsports-2011-090236.
6. Shields N, Synnot A. Perceived barriers and facilitators to participation in physical activity for children with disability: a qualitative study. *BMC Pediatr*. 2016 Jan 19;16:9. doi: 10.1186/s12887-016-0544-7.
7. Goldfield GS, Harvey A, Grattan K, Adamo KB. Physical activity promotion in the preschool years: a critical period to intervene. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2012;9(4):1326-42. doi: 10.3390/ijerph9041326.