



# Preschooler

## STEP COUNTS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

### *focus*

Canadian physical activity guidelines recommend that children ages 3-4 years should accumulate at least 180 min of physical activity, at any intensity, throughout the day.

### Physical activity in preschoolers leads to greater overall health, but how many steps are enough?

Physical activity in the early years of life is crucial to the proper growth and development of your child, but also in setting the basis for health-related behaviours later in life. It has always been assumed that preschoolers are “active enough” and receiving the required amount of daily physical activity, but recent research has suggested this may not be the case. To determine whether young children are attaining the recommended daily minutes of physical activity, counting the number of daily steps is a useful measurement. In a study by researchers at McMaster University,

over 100 preschoolers were asked to wear an accelerometer for 7 consecutive days. Accelerometers have the ability to distinguish walking and running movements from movements such as car vibrations. The accelerometers recorded activity and step count data every 3 seconds, allowing for the comparison between the number of steps children were taking and how much physical activity they were actually getting. The researchers found that preschoolers should be getting at least 6000 steps per day to meet the Canadian physical activity guidelines.



## Step Counts of Preschoolers

Physical activity recommendations for preschoolers have been prepared by Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom demonstrating the great interest and importance in monitoring physical activity behaviours early in life. Pedometers, also known as step-counters, are an easy, inexpensive way to determine whether children are getting enough physical activity. To reach the required 6000 steps per day, children need to be active for a large portion of their day. This means reducing the amount of sedentary time and increasing the amount of time spent playing sports, active outdoor games, and other sources of physical activity.



**Engaging in moderate-to-vigorous physical activities is a good way to increase step count and help children attain the recommended 6000 steps**

**Limit the amount of time your child participates in sedentary activities to give them a head start to a healthy lifestyle**



the  
**HOPP**  
s t u d y

**Learn about preschool health and physical activity through a study conducted at McMaster University!**

**Contact Nicole at  
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us online at  
fhs.mcmaster.ca/chemp**

## Are Preschoolers Taking Enough Steps?

The Canadian physical activity guidelines recommend that children up to age 4 have at least 180 minutes of physical activity, of any intensity, throughout the day and 60 minutes of energetic play daily by age 5. To meet the guidelines, researchers at McMaster University recommend children take at least 6000 steps every day. In their study, the researchers found that 65% of participants from the ages of 3-5 years in South-Central Ontario met the recommendation of 6000 steps every day. However, only 57% of participants attained the 60 minutes of energetic play recommended. Energetic play or moderate- to vigorous- physical activity includes biking, running, playing tag and other activities that increase heart rate and cause children to be out of breath.

### Did You Know?



Companies are creating shoes with built in pedometers, and shoes that you can insert pedometers under the insole, to help individuals monitor the amount of steps they're taking daily. By monitoring their steps, individuals can determine whether they're reaching physical activity guidelines.

## Ways to Increase your Child's Step Count

- ★ **Colour outdoors:** Instead of having your child sitting at a table colouring, have them go outside and draw with chalk. This will get them up and moving, while enjoying the sun and fresh air.
- ★ **Replace Story time with Drama plays:** To promote creativity in your child and increase their step count, have them act out stories and fairy tales with you.
- ★ **Walk or Bike:** Instead of driving to your destinations, walk or bike with your child to increase the daily amount of physical activity.
- ★ **Play Games:** Make TV time more active by creating a game out of it. Have your child do a walk around the living room with you every time commercials come on, or see who walks around the living room faster every time something yellow comes up on the screen.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Active Healthy Kids Canada ([www.activehealthykids.ca](http://www.activehealthykids.ca))  
 Best Start Resource Centre ([www.beststart.org/haveaballtogether/campaign.html](http://www.beststart.org/haveaballtogether/campaign.html))  
 Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute ([www.cflri.ca](http://www.cflri.ca))  
 Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology ([www.csep.ca/guidelines](http://www.csep.ca/guidelines))  
 Caring for Kids ([www.caringforkids.cps.ca](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca))  
 McMaster University Child Health & Exercise Medicine Program ([fhs.mcmaster.ca/chemp](http://fhs.mcmaster.ca/chemp))  
 ParticipACTION ([www.participaction.com](http://www.participaction.com))

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