



Preschooler *focus*

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND YOUR PRESCHOOLER

Worldwide, 22 million children under the age of 5 are overweight or obese. Children who are obese at ages three to five are nearly five times more likely to be obese as a young adult. The preschool years are a critical time to prevent the onset of obesity and to support children's health-related behaviors, including physical activity.

Play is important for motor development

The preschool years are described by the development of movement, stability, and throwing/catching skills that were introduced in the toddler period. Improvement in these skills does not occur on their own. Children need opportunities to practice the activities and to receive feedback and encouragement from parents and significant others.

The majority of physical activity in preschoolers occurs during free play rather than through structured activity.

Play is important for the physical development of muscles and bones, endurance, and movement.

When preschoolers are active, they tend to participate in very brief periods of activity, spending very little time at an intensity considered vigorous. Many assume that preschool children are active enough; however, growing research suggests that this is not necessarily the case. Research shows that preschool-aged children spend the majority of their time in non-active or sedentary activities.



Screen Time – did you know?

Screen time refers to TV, computer, and electronic games.

The Canadian Pediatric Society recommends that screen time be limited to less than 1 to 2 hours per day of quality educational programming (e.g. Sesame Street) for children older than 2 years of age. The American Pediatric Society recommends zero screen time for children under 2 years.

Children who watch more than 2 hours per day of television are more likely to be overweight. Watching large amounts of TV that is not educational can delay language and mental development.



Physical Activity Recommendations

Although more research is needed to know how much and what type of physical activity (duration and intensity) is important for preschooler health, Dr. Timmons (2007) has made the following recommendations:

Experts suggest that preschoolers should not be sedentary (inactive) for more than 60 minutes at a time except when sleeping.

Children who spend more time outside or in play spaces often get more physical activity than children who have less time outdoors.



the **HOPP** study

Learn about your preschoolers' health and physical activity through a study conducted at McMaster University! Contact Nicole at proudfna@mcmaster.ca or (905) 521-2100 x.77217 or visit us online at fhs.mcmaster.ca/chemp

- ❖ Provide opportunities for spontaneous and intermittent activity, which is the natural way preschoolers play.
- ❖ Focus on gross motor play (e.g. running, hopping, jumping) and movement activities that children find fun.
- ❖ Play with your preschooler in a way that they can imitate you to learn new skills.
- ❖ Whenever possible, give preschoolers access to large play spaces and equipment outdoors.

Get Active with Your Preschooler:

- Have fun in the snow making snowballs, snow angels, or building snowmen.
- Go tobogganing or skating.
- Turn up some music and dance! Add ribbons or scarves to make it more exciting.
- Head to the local playground and encourage climbing, swinging, and play.
- Play tag or chase using hopping, waddling, or dancing instead of running.
- Play catch or kickball with balls of different sizes and textures.
- Build forts indoors with sofa cushions, blankets, chairs, and cardboard boxes.
- Relay races and obstacle courses using hopping and jumping.
- Take a walk after dinner and play: I Spy, Count Off, or When you hear.
- Set up a scavenger hunt using toys and household items.

CHILD CARE

Did you know?



For preschoolers in child care, the specific child care *facility* has the most impact on how much physical activity your child will get.

Physical activity levels are quite different from one facility to another.

Find out what your child care arrangement is doing to keep kids active!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Active Healthy Kids Canada (www.activehealthykids.ca)
 Best Start Resource Centre (www.beststart.org/haveaballtogether/campaign.html)
 Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (www.cflri.ca)
 McMaster University Child Health & Exercise Medicine Program (fhs.mcmaster.ca/chemp)
 ParticipACTION (www.participaction.com)

References:

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 Tucker, P. 2008. The physical activity levels of preschool-aged children: a systematic review. *Early Child. Res. Q.*, 23: 547-558.