



Preschooler *focus*

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN CHILD CARE

Physical activity is important to your child's health and motor development. Different environments in your child's life (e.g. home, school, child care) greatly impact how much physical activity he/she gets on a daily basis. In Canada, about half of children under the age of 6 are in some form of child care away from their parents.

For preschoolers in child care, the specific facility has a large impact on how much physical activity they engage in.

Child care generally refers to centre-based facilities that look after young children (e.g. preschools and daycares). Physical activity levels of children are quite different between child care facilities. In general, physical activity levels are low during a typical day in child care. The child care physical environment (e.g. space, equipment) and policies greatly influence the physical activity levels of their children. Research suggests that children are more active in centres

where the majority of staff are college-educated. These facilities are also more likely to provide their staff with additional training in physical activity behavior and promotion. Child care centres with the most active children have:

1. more than 1.5 hours/day outside.
2. more than 2 hours/day of free play.
3. more than 4 activity-related field trips per month.
4. class sizes of less than 18 children.



What about children in home-based child care?

Most of what we know about physical activity levels of children in child care comes from centre-based environments. Much less is known about activity taking place in home-based childcare arrangements. Home-based refers to child care out of the caregiver's home. In Ontario, caregivers are limited to looking after a maximum of five children under the age of 10.

In a Canadian study, even in homes that provided very good environments and large spaces for moving, physical activity was very low. About half of the children spent more than 60 minutes at a time being sedentary (e.g. sitting, watching tv). Experts suggest that preschoolers should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time except when sleeping.



Experts recommend limiting screen time (e.g. TV, computer) in young children.

Did you know?

Children in centre-based child care normally get less daily screen time than children in parental or home-based care!

Want to increase physical activity levels?

Spend more time in free play (unstructured activities) in areas such as playgrounds and gymnasiums.



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HOPP
s t u d y

Learn about your preschooler's 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

Recommendations for Child Care Facilities

You can make simple changes to your play space to increase physical activity.

Below are some suggestions from Dowda (2009):

- ✎ **Use more portable playground equipment such as balls, hoops, tunnels, and tricycles.** Children tend to hang around or under fixed equipment like playgrounds and slides. Adding inexpensive items such as balls promotes active games.
- ✎ **Increase play space area.** At least 7m² (75 square feet) of play area per child is recommended to improve activity. Don't have this much space? Try reducing the number of children out playing at once.
- ✎ **Put restrictions on screen time.** Limiting the use of electronic media such as computers and TVs can increase active time.

IS IT TRUE?
ARE BOYS MORE
ACTIVE THAN GIRLS?



While the jury is still out, current research in child care suggests that even at a young age boys are more active than girls!

Why?

- Boys tend to play games that are more aggressive.
- During free play, games that boys play tend to last longer.

Fun Ways to get Groups of Preschoolers Active:

Shoe Shuffle: Children take off their shoes and put them in a pile in the middle of a circle, then back away. Shuffle the shoes around. Have the kids race to find their shoes and put them back on. First one wins!

Duck, Duck, Goose: Sit in a circle and choose one child to be 'it', who walks around the circle tapping each head while saying 'duck' or 'goose'. When the child calls someone a 'goose', they race around the circle. Last one back becomes 'it'.

Shape Marching: Draw a large shape on the floor with tape or chalk. Let the first child in the line be the 'leader' and have the other children follow while the 'leader' hops, jumps, and dances along the shape. Alternatively, play music while the children walk or dance along the shape. As soon as the music stops, everyone has to sit down as fast as they can.

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)

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