



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Physical activity is a natural part of a child's life. Children enjoy being active and it is generally the role of the parent/caregiver to provide enough time throughout the day to ensure the child is receiving adequate physical activity.

As stated by Lawrence Schweinhart (1988), "Encouraging children to initiate activities enables them to develop their strengths as well as to strengthen their weaknesses. As children develop their strengths, they learn they can do things they want to do, so they develop feelings of competence and self-confidence".

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Why is Physical Activity so Important for Young Children?

“Childhood is the time to begin the development of active, healthy lifestyles. The development of skills, knowledge, and attitudes leading to active, healthy lifestyles must be taught. Placing the child on the road to a lifetime of movement should begin early to ensure a lifetime of good health”. (NASPE & COPEC, 2000 p.3)

“As professionals in the early learning and child care sector, you, along with parents, play a significant and important role in providing children with skills and experiences that will influence and impact their long-term success. Success can be measured not just by a person’s education and career path, but by their contribution to society, their health and happiness. There is an abundance of research that demonstrates the important role that physical activity plays in contributing to success in all of these areas” (Best Start, 2005, p.39).

How Active Are Canadian Children?

As stated by Active Healthy Kids Canada:

- One-half of Canadian children are NOT active enough for optimal growth and development
- Only 9% of boys and 4% of girls meet the Canadian Physical Activity recommendations
- Children become less active as they get older
- Children have less time for active play when they are in school
- Girls tend to become less active than boys as they get older

Inactivity in childhood can lead to:

- the average Canadian child being sedentary for six hours a day in front of the screen
- Increased risk of weight gain and obesity
- Among children and youth aged 6 to 17, the prevalence of obesity was 8.6% according to the Canadian Health Measures Survey 2007-2009.
- Increased risk of heart and bone disease and some cancers later in life
- Increased risk of adult onset or type 2 diabetes (which has been observed in children with marked obesity)
- Obesity among Aboriginal children and youth is high varying from 16.9% among Metis to 20.0% among off-reserve First Nations to 25.6% among Inuit (ages 6 to 14 years;; self-reported data from the 2006 Aboriginal Peoples Survey).

Healthy Active Living for Children and Youth – CPS
and Canadian Medical Association

For more research statistics on how active Canadian children are, please refer to the “What the Research Says” insert from Best Start’s Have a Ball resource, included in the resource folder of this session.



Physical Activity and a Child's Overall Development

For preschoolers, physical activity is an important aspect of proper growth and development which will lead to lifelong health and wellness.

There are 3 main developmental areas which are learned and/or enhanced through a preschooler's participation in regular physical activity. The 3 areas for preschool developmental achievement include: sorting out feelings/emotions, psychological development and enhancing physical skills.

1) **KNOWLEDGE (Affect)** – growth of feelings or emotions

- Promote self respect
 - Positive self-image and self-esteem
 - Motivation and confidence
- Develop Social Skills
 - Share with others and take turns
 - Appropriate play
- Understand enjoyment and develop a positive attitude about active lifestyles

2) **ATTITUDE (Cognition)** – psychological development

- Communication
- Understand basic rules and participate in group play
- Follow basic instructions
- Learn about various objects, shapes, sizes, weights etc.
- Problem solving
- Body Awareness
 - Various body parts
 - Background movement
 - Effort and/or force required
 - Spatial awareness (of surroundings and body parts with objects)



3) **SKILLS (Physical literacy)** – development of fundamental movement skills and enhancing physical well being

- Movement skills such as:
 - Walking, running & jumping
 - Throwing & catching
 - Balance
 - Hand-eye coordination
- Simultaneous movement
- Satisfies curiosity of movement
- Use various pieces of equipment
 - i.e. swing, scooter, tricycle, balls
- Health related fitness
 - Build strong bones and muscles
 - Strengthen heart
 - Maintain flexibility
 - Promote good posture and balance

Retrieved from: Canadian Sport for Life, 2008
Moving with a Purpose, 2000



How Active Should Young Children Be?

According to NASPE, infants should be encouraged to be physically active from the beginning of life. Promoting and fostering enjoyment of movement and motor skill confidence and competence at an early age will help to ensure healthy development and later participation in physical activity. Babies and young children who spend several hours at a time in strollers, play pens and infant seats, may experience delays in development such as rolling over, crawling, walking and even cognitive development. Such restrictions may also begin the path to sedentary preferences and childhood obesity.

Summary of Guidelines

Infants (birth to twelve months):

- Be allowed to explore their environment without any restriction of movement
- Promote physical activity in a way that takes their natural activity patterns into consideration
- Be given the opportunity to perform large muscle activities through daily interaction with parents and/or caregivers
- Be provided with safe play areas to encourage physical activity
- Children under the age of two, should not spend any time viewing television or other electronic media

Toddlers (12 - 36 months) require a minimum of:

- 30 minutes each day – structured activity
- 60 minutes or longer – unstructured activity
- *Toddlers should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time except when sleeping* **TOTAL = 90 minutes/day minimum**
- Encourage physical activity throughout the day and allow it to be intermittent and spontaneous



Preschoolers (3 to 5 years) require a minimum of:

- 60 minutes each day – structured activity
- 60 minutes or longer – unstructured activity **TOTAL = 2 hours/day minimum**
- *Preschoolers should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time except when sleeping*
- Emphasis should be placed on the various stages of skill development
- Encourage fun and physical activity as a part of lifelong healthy living

National Association for Sport & Physical Education, 2002

Structured Activity

- Includes games and activities that you plan and lead
- Children require structured activity to ensure that they are provided sufficient opportunity to take part in a variety of movements at different skill levels

Unstructured Activity

- Supervised free time lead by the child
- Allows the child to explore their surroundings and participate in activities they enjoy and are familiar with

Remember that the minimum daily physical activity requirements do not have to be completed all at once. Each ten minute period of activity can be added up separately to reach the child's daily goal.



Tips for Successful Physical Activity Participation

Developing Skills and Concepts

- Provide frequent and meaningful instruction on a variety of activities
- Choose activities that will allow the child to practice and develop movement concepts and motor skills

Utilization of Fine and Gross Motor Skills

- Encourage the development of both fine and gross motor skills equally

Encourage Variety and Practice

- Allow adequate time for development of skills
- Encourage repetition of a specific skill throughout various environments
- Provide ongoing instruction when required

Promoting Success for all Children

- Provide ongoing opportunities to practice various skills
- Adjust the difficulty of a skill in order to prevent the child from being discouraged
- Continue to encourage the child by using positive feedback

Developing Health-Related Fitness

- Encourage participation in fun activities
- Utilize various learning opportunities to enhance the child's respect and knowledge of movement

Facilitating Maximum participation

- Organize activities that can be participated in by any child
- Frequently modify activities to enhance maximum participation
- Provide enough equipment to allow participation of all children simultaneously
- Use a vast assortment of equipment (ie. different shapes, sizes, textures and weight) to keep the activity interesting
- Encourage the child to experiment with new skills, to increase their knowledge, confidence and progression of skills

Adapted from NASPE & COPEC, 2000

Incorporating Physical Activity for all Abilities & Ten Tips for Having a Ball with Young Children

For tips on promoting physical activity for children with disabilities as well as suggestions on how to encourage continued participation by all children, please refer to the 'Have a Ball with Physical Activity' handout located in the resource folder for this session.



What is the Best Type of Physical Activity for Preschoolers?

In regards to physical activity and movement, the main goal that should be put forth for a preschooler is to develop and master fundamental life skills that will act as the building blocks for their future.

Physical activity, no matter what the age, should include a proper warm up, followed by a combination of endurance, flexibility and/or strength training and ending with an adequate cool down, and preschoolers are no exception. Below, are a few suggested activities for some, but definitely not all of the areas of a child's development.

Endurance – to strengthen the heart & lungs

- Walking, running
- Jumping, galloping
- Skipping
- Tag
- Riding tricycles/bicycles

Flexibility – encourage bending, stretching and reaching

- Dancing
- Gymnastics
- Yoga

Strength – build strong muscles and bones

- Climbing
- Obstacle courses

Motor Development – encourage awareness of how the body moves

- Large muscle group movements
 - Swimming
 - Ice Skating
- Fine Motor Skills
 - Play dough
 - Drawing, painting
- Hand-eye coordination
 - Throwing
 - Catching
- Spatial Awareness
 - Red light, green light
 - Moving like a particular object (animal, plane, etc)
 - Moving with a variety of steps (quick/slow, long/short)
- Coordination
 - Itsy Bitsy Spider song with actions
 - Head & Shoulders song with actions
- Balance
 - Balance beam walking
 - Stork stands etc.
 - Riding tricycles & bicycles



Group games (small teamwork activities) – promote cooperation and allow for individual differences

Moving and Growing-Exercises and Activities for Fives and Sixes, 2002



For more physical activity ideas, please refer to the Busy Bodies book in the resource folder of this nutrition session.

Preschool Physical Activity Checklist

Are you providing the best activities to enhance the child's growth and development?

- All activities are age appropriate
- A minimum of 60 minutes of structured activity daily
- A minimum of 60 minutes of unstructured activity daily
- Fundamental skills are performed with various levels of difficulty, modifications and/or enhancements are made as appropriate
- Includes a variety of different activities which vary throughout the week
- Includes activities that are appealing, fun and safe
- Requires endurance
- Enhances flexibility
- Encourages muscular strength activities
- Provides an opportunity to develop basic motor skills
- Provides and encourages children to use a variety of equipment
- Encourages children to freely investigate their surroundings
- Include both individual play as well as small group activities





Encouraging Positive Body Image and Self Esteem

Promoting regular physical activity, eating well and healthy self-esteem can help children grow up with a positive body image. Self-esteem is the feeling of self-worth while body image is the mental picture a person has of his or her body. Research suggests that young people with high self-esteem are less susceptible to interpersonal problems, conforming to social pressure, poor body image, and eating disorders. A child's belief that he or she has the ability to perform physical activity skills is connected to self-esteem in very young children. By getting involved as an active role model, providing encouragement and offering a variety of opportunities to be active you can influence how a child feels about their physical activity skills.

Body image is shaped from birth by interactions with others, exposure to media messages and individual feelings. Children learn unhealthy attitudes towards food and weight at a very early age. By age 5 girls associate a diet with food restriction and thinness. By age 6 girls develop negative feelings towards large body types. Here are some strategies for promoting diversity, tolerance and healthy attitudes to eating and activity to help children develop a positive body image:

- Help children to accept and feel good about themselves by supporting, accepting and encouraging them, regardless of their body size and shape.
- Provide opportunities to master skills using their bodies. Help kids have fun being active.
- Enjoy the pleasures of eating, preparing and growing food with the children.
- Try to be aware of critical messages you may send about your own body or the appearance of others. Do not talk about dieting or share weight loss tips around the children.
- Discourage teasing and put-downs. Let children know that making comments about people's weight, shape or size is not acceptable.
- Praise children for how they behave, how they treat others, and their accomplishments, rather than how they look.
- Encourage children to focus on their abilities rather than on their appearance. Help them identify things they like about themselves.
- Teach children that healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes. Every shape can be healthy if being active and eating well are daily routines.



Physical Activity Resource List:

For more information on physical literacy (overall concept, full list of skills and various stages of development) follow this link to the Canadian Sport for Life document <http://www.canadiansportforlife.ca>

This link will take you to a booklet for parents (or childcare providers) on developing physical literacy <http://www.sasksport.sk.ca/CS4L/pdf/DPL.pdf>

For a complete list of resources, please refer to the Best Start, 2005 Have a Ball Resource for Physical Activity and the Early Years. This resource can be found online, with various topics from the binder which can be downloaded, including:

- What the Research Says
- Resource Selection Criteria
- Resources
- Great Ideas
- Have a Ball with a Ball
- Fact Sheets – Professionals
- Fact Sheets - Parents

This resource tool kit can be found at:

http://www.beststart.org/resources/hlthy_chld_dev/index.html

Quick Links for Parents and Child Care Providers

Canadian Child Care Foundation

www.cccf.ca

Canadian Institute of Child Health – Dedicated to promoting and protecting the health, well-being and rights of all children and youth.

www.cich.ca

Canada's Physical Activity Guide for Children

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/paguide/guides/en/children

Healthy Start for Life – FAQ's

www.dietitians.ca/healthystart/content/resources/fags.asp

Canadian Pediatric Society – Recommended guidelines for good health

www.caringforkids.cps.ca

Active Healthy Kids Foundation – Information on programs, trends in physical activity

www.activehealthykids.ca



Active Minds Active Bodies – List of books with positive physical activity messages. The lists are organized by grade and age.

www.choices4health.org

Physical Activity Resource Centre (PARC) - provides training and consultation, networking, referrals, and resource and information dissemination services.

www.ophea.net/parc

Resources/Books/Videos

Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (CAHPERD) suggests and sells resources for early childhood physical education:

- *500 Five-Minute Games* Silberg | 1995 | 272 pp | \$ 33.95 (Member \$30.55)
Includes games, songs and easy learning ideas designed to capture the energy and enthusiasm of children aged three to six. Games focus on balance, body awareness, cooperation and coordination. Additionally there are games for drama, language and numbers.
- *Active for Life* Sanders | 2002 | 128 pp | \$ 32.95 (Member \$29.65)
Developmentally Appropriate Movement Programs For Young Children.
This book provides guidance on what high-quality movement programs should include: effective movement environments, components of physical activity and more.
- *Wiggle, Giggle & Shake* Pica | 2001 | 216 pp | \$ 33.95 (Member \$30.55)
200 movement-inspired activities for children aged four to eight to encourage children to participate physically in their learning. There are 38 themes including transportation, seasons, animals and holidays.
- *Snow Fun! Favourite Canadian Winter Activities* CIRA | 2000 | 80 pp | \$20 (Member \$18)
This collection of fun winter physical activities includes scavengers, relays, tags and more. Each activity outlines the description, objective, skills, age, space, equipment and variations with. Games appropriate for indoors are indicated.
- *Growing Up Through Games and Play* Lehnert & Lachmann | 240 pp | \$26.95 (Members \$ 24.25)
CAHPERD endorses this as an excellent resource for child care staff caring for three to six year olds. More than 600 exercises and activities help develop children's basic movement skills such as skipping, throwing, catching and climbing.



Purchase or order from a bookstore, specialty bookstore or multi-media store:

- *Sesame Street's: SS Elmoize and Get Up and Dance*
 - SS Elmoize: Elmo's exercise camp features children and Muppets bending, stretching and getting fit.
 - Get Up and Dance: Big Bird throws a dance party and shows children his favourite dances

- *The Wiggles: Wiggle Time* Lyrick Entertainment | 1999 | 40 mins | Approx \$14.95
This 40-minute video features 16 fun songs to dance, wiggle and teach song-specific movements and lyrics. The costumed characters Dorothy the Dinosaur, Captain Feathersword, Henry the Octopus and Wags the Dog are phenomenally popular in Australia. The Wiggles encourage children very well to be active. Toddlers and children up to age five enjoy chances to participate in songs with actions and body movements.

- *Moving With A Purpose: Developing Programs for Preschoolers of All Ages* McCall, Craft | 2000 | 248 pp | \$ 25 US

This easy-to-use guide to building movement programs claims it is presented in such way that even those with no experience teaching movement can practice it immediately. It explains the fundamentals of movement and motor development, features 54 proven activities, how to teach and assess movements, and addresses special needs.

- *SportFun: Developmentally Appropriate Movement Skill Activities for 3-5 year olds* 2001 | 94 pp | \$29 US

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (in USA) has an easy-to-use packet that teaches ways to help preschool aged children practice and improve basic movement skills like running, jumping and playing skills. It includes 40 full-colour illustrated activity cards, instructions for correctly teaching enjoyable activities and guide for equipment. More like play rather than tedious exercise, the activities can be set up easily and safely according to the appropriate pace. Examples: Hot Potato, Spacewalk, Band Aid Tag, Rabbit Trails.

Source: Sport and Recreation Division of the Nova Scotia Office of Health Promotion - *Active Living in Early Childhood*.

References:

Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Peoples Survey – Concepts and Methods Guide (Ottawa, Ont.: Statistics Canada, 2009).

Best Start. 2005. Have a Ball: A toolkit for Physical Activity and the Early Years.

National Association for Sport and Physical Education & Council on Physical Education for Children. 2000. Appropriate Practices in Movement Programs for Young Children Ages 3-5.

The Canadian Institute of Child Health. Moving and Growing: Exercises and Activities for Fives and Sixes.



McCall R., Craft D. 2000. Moving with a Purpose: Developing Programs for Preschoolers of All Abilities. Human Kinetics

McCall R. & Craft D. 2004. Purposeful Play: Early Childhood Movement Activities on a Budget. Human Kinetics.

Ontario Public Health Association & Nutrition Resource Centre. Eat Right Be Active: A guide for parents and caregivers of preschoolers ages 3 to 5.

Statistics Canada, Canadian Health Measures Survey (CHMS), Cycle 1 Data Table 34 2007 to 2009. (Ottawa Ont.: Statistics Canada, 2010) Cat No. 82-623-X.