

How much physical activity do toddlers and preschoolers need?



Toddlers and preschoolers should be active every day in order to help them grow and develop properly and to have a healthy weight. Over half of Canada's children are not active enough for healthy growth and development. Inactivity is a major contributor of excess weight gain leading to obesity in children.

Adopting a physically active lifestyle early in life increases the likelihood that children will learn to move skilfully and enjoy being active. Children whose parents are active and who have adequate time to be physically active have a better chance of staying active as they get older.

According to physical activity guidelines for infants and children released by the National Association for Sport and Physical Activity*:

- Toddlers should get at least 30 minutes of structured¹ physical activity daily; preschoolers need at least 60 minutes.
- Toddlers and preschoolers should get at least 60 minutes and up to several hours of unstructured² physical activity daily and should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time except when sleeping.

¹ Structured physical activity includes games and activities that you direct or do with your toddler/preschooler.

² Unstructured physical activity is supervised free time for children to play actively on their own or with other children.

Preschoolers should begin with simple activities that develop skills for more complex activities. For example, a 2 or 3-year old child may be able to kick a large ball

without losing balance, or run after it and stop it with two hands before kicking again. A 3 to 4-year old child can kick a ball with more accuracy and retrieve it with two hands while the ball is in motion.

Basic movement skills such as running, jumping, throwing and kicking do not just happen as a child grows older. These skills develop depending on each child's heredity, activity experiences and their environment. For example, a child who does not use stairs may be delayed in stair climbing and a child who is discouraged from bouncing and chasing balls may lag in hand-eye coordination.

In order to help children develop their activity skills parents and caregivers should be active with their children on a daily basis. Giving children ample time for physically active free play time indoors and outdoors is also important to help children develop their activity skills such as running, jumping, hopping, skipping and climbing.

*Adapted from "**Active Start: A statement of physical activity guidelines for children from birth to five years.**" The National Association for Sport and Physical Activity. February 6, 2002.

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