

## What kinds of physical activities are appropriate for preschoolers?



Children of all ages can and should be involved in a variety of different activities. The kinds of activities they can do depend on their age and stage of development. While children all follow a basic development pattern, they grow and develop at widely varying rates. The movement or activity skills they are capable of doing vary just as much. Also, different activities will appeal to some children but not others. It's important to plan activities that correspond to a child's individual capabilities and interests.

**Three types of activities** all contribute to a healthy body. Combine all 3 types when planning activities for preschoolers:

- **Endurance** activities that strengthen the heart and lungs such as running, jumping and swimming.
- **Flexibility** activities that encourage children to bend, stretch and reach such as gymnastics and dancing.
- **Strength** building activities that build strong muscles and bones such as climbing.

### **Movement abilities and activities for toddlers and preschoolers**

Children age 2 to 3 are just beginning or are able to:

- Walk forward and backward, run and jump, and climb up and down stairs
- Walk along a balance beam or board with or without help
- Throw a ball or bean bag using two hands
- Kick a large ball without losing balance, or runs after it and stops it with two hands before kicking again
- Hit a suspended balloon or ball with a large bat
- Crawl and climb up and through play structures and household furniture
- Sit with balance on a swing, while being gently pushed from behind by an adult

- Sit on and skilfully move a riding toy, pushing with two feet

**Activities suitable for children age 2 to 3 include:**

- Stop and go walking and running games; tag
- Balance Beam (not more than 25 cm off ground)
- Follow the leader obstacle course
- Ball play; throw and retrieve, ball kicking
- Hitting and batting
- Ice skating with assistance
- Water play and swimming
- Rhythm, music and dance
- Marching band, rhythmical activities, hopping and singing games

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**Children age 3 to 4 are just beginning or are able to:**

- Walk forward and backward with varying speed and in different directions
- Walk balanced on tip toes
- Jump with increased skill over objects and in combination with walking or running
- Catch a large ball
- Kick a ball with more accuracy and retrieve it with two hands while the ball is in motion
- Hit a ball off batting tee with large bat
- Climb with coordination, balance and a firm grip on large play structure
- Pedal and manoeuvre a tricycle, big wheels, or small two-wheeled bicycle with or without training wheels
- Swim moving arms and kicking feet, while firmly supported under hips and chest by adult

**Activities suitable for children age 3 to 4 include:**

- Walking and running games; tag
- Jumping over a line
- Balance beam - not more than 50 cm or waist height off the ground (hold hand or stand - beside child for safety)
- Throwing and catching
- Hitting and batting
- Kicking to a partner and retrieving
- Ice skating

- Play structure or obstacle course with ladders, tunnels, ropes, balance board
- Swimming, parents and tot swimming classes
- Rhythm, music and dance
- Blanket and parachute game

**Children age 5 to 6 are just beginning or are able to:**

- Walk, run, and jump well
- Climb big play structures to their own comfort level
- Catch and throw large and small objects with improved accuracy
- Develop hand-eye coordination
- Develop spatial awareness - how the child judges movement in relations of objects and people
- Develop the concept of teamwork but game skills are not developed
- Respond readily to rhythm and music
- Desire vigorous activity but this may lead to carelessness, especially with others
- Tire easily but recover quickly

**Activities suitable for children age 5 to 6 include:**

- Running and skipping
- Gymnastics and martial arts
- Ropes, bars and climbers
- Games with objects of various sizes, shapes and textures such as balls, beanbags, scoops, and bats.

- Games with a minimum number of rules and instructions.
- Small groups games emphasizing cooperation rather than competition
- Ice skating and cross country skiing
- Swimming
- Rhythm movement including walking, marching, clapping and running.
- Strenuous activities with rest and water breaks.

\* Adapted from "Moving and Growing - Exercises and activities for twos, threes, and fours" and "Moving and Growing - Exercises and activities for fives and sixes".  
Government of Canada Fitness and Amateur Sport,  
Canadian Institute of Child Health, 2000.

Making physical activity a part of each day is fun and healthy. Encouraging preschoolers to play actively everyday helps create a pattern that may stay with them the rest of their lives.