

How to keep your children active

How to keep your children active

Most parents realise exercise is important for children to keep them healthy while they're growing up, as well as when they're adults. But studies also suggest physical activity and sport have an effect not just on children's physical development but their social and emotional development too.

One report from the University of Oxford and Loughborough University even claims there's a strong link between physically active children and improved self-esteem, confidence, attention span and performance at school.

According to Public Health England, many parents tend to overestimate how active their children are. If your children aren't as active as they should be, you may also blame the TV, internet or computer games. But there are easy and even enjoyable ways to get your children – and the rest of the family – up and moving.

Did you know?

Just 21 per cent of boys and 16 per cent of girls aged between five and fifteen in England meet the current daily exercise guidelines. (Source: Statistics on Obesity, Physical Activity and Diet: England 2014, Health and Social Care Information Centre)

How much exercise do children need?

The Chief Medical Officers of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland recommend that physical activity should be encouraged from birth onwards. How much exercise your child needs, however, depends on how old they are:

Under fives

Children who can walk by themselves without any help should be active every day for at least 180 minutes spread throughout the day, either indoors or outdoors.

From five to 18

Children and young people over the age of five are recommended to do at least 60 minutes of aerobic activity every day, including moderate-intensity activities and vigorous-intensity activities. Part of their 60 minutes of exercise should also include activities that help to strengthen their muscles and bones.

As well as helping them to do well at school and raising their confidence, being active for at least 60 minutes a day improves your child's heart and bone health, and makes it easier for them to maintain a healthy weight.

Meanwhile, experts advise that all children and young people should limit the amount of time they spend sitting each day too, which means reducing

How to keep your children active

the time they spend watching TV, using their computer or playing computer games.

Types of activities

Moderate-intensity activities make your child work hard enough to feel warmer, breathe harder and their hearts to beat a bit faster (though they should still be able to carry on a conversation). Playing playground games, brisk walking or riding a bike are all good examples.

Vigorous-intensity activities on the other hand, make children breathe much harder and faster while increasing their heart rate quite a bit. If they're exercising vigorously, they shouldn't be able to carry on a conversation easily. Examples include fast running, swimming and playing football.

Muscle and bone strengthening activities involve using body weight or working against resistance, such as skipping, hopping, gymnastics, tennis or swinging on playground equipment.

Formal sports - whether in or out of school – are ideal activities, including organised team sports such as football, rugby, cricket and netball as well as running, athletics, swimming, gymnastics, weight training, aerobics and tennis. Examples of informal activities for children and young people include cycling, dancing, skating, trampolining, hopscotch, active play, skipping and even housework and gardening.

Walking to school

Travelling to and from school is recognised as a

way for children to meet part of their recommended amount of daily physical activity. Plus, it's free, easy to do – and it's good for the environment.

Walking to school is good for parents too. For instance, it could improve your heart and circulation, increase your mental health and wellbeing and help you with weight loss while boosting your immune system.

Walking to school also exposes your children to less air pollution than sitting in a car during the school run. Studies suggest people in cars are exposed to three times as much pollution as pedestrians because they're sitting in the line of exhaust fumes from the car in front.

Safety, however, is a priority when it comes to walking to school, so make sure you've worked out the safest route before you start. You may also want to consider starting a Walk Together scheme, which shares your school walk with other nearby parents. There's a handy guide on Walk Together schemes on the charity Living Streets' website.

Meanwhile, if you live too far from your child's school to walk, why not consider driving and parking about 15 minutes' walking distance from the school, then walking the last part of the journey together?

Fun for all the family

One way to keep your children active is to make sure exercise never becomes boring. If you get the whole family involved, being active can be

How to keep your children active

much more fun. Here are some ideas for things you can all do together that won't break the bank:

Discover nature

Find a nearby wood by visiting visitwoods.org.uk (enter your postcode and you'll get a list of the woods nearest to where you live). Then download some activities from the Woodland Trust's Nature Detectives website, such as the Beautiful butterflies' spotter sheet, which encourages children to look for and identify butterflies in the woods (or your back garden).

Walk yourself fit

Instead of taking your children for a drive, why not go for a walk instead? Walking is good for children's bones and muscles, and there are lots of interesting walks around the country that the whole family can do for free. If you live in London, try finding an interesting walk at www.walklondon.org.uk. There are lots of walks to discover, including those that take in the city's sights. If you live outside London, there are thousands of walks around the country to find at www.walk4life.info.

Get on your bike

Cycling is also a great way of keeping your family healthy, but make sure you and your child know how to ride a bike safely – visit bikeability.org.uk to find out how to take part in cycling proficiency sessions. Then when you're ready to go out and explore, you can find details of different types of cycle rides around the country at www.sustrans.org.uk.

Alternatively, try roller skating, rollerblading, skateboarding, scootering – or during the winter months, go ice skating instead.

Go fly a kite

Everyone loves to fly kites, so find your local kite group at the Kite Society of Great Britain's website. Local groups include experienced kite fliers who can give you whatever advice you need to fly your kite successfully – some groups even run workshops where your children can make their own kites.

Put on your dancing shoes

Thanks to TV shows such as Strictly Come Dancing and Britain's Got Talent, dancing is a very popular activity these days, not to mention lots of fun. According to the NHS, more than 4.8 million people regularly attend community dance groups each year in England alone.

There are lots of ways of finding local dance classes, including looking for information in local papers or asking at your local library. You can also find dance classes near where you live by searching the DanceNearYou website.

Alternatively, you can get dancing right now at home for free – all you need is music. There are dance steps and games for families to try at www.change4life.co.uk, plus you can learn about (and try out) different dance styles.

In fact, whatever activities you and your family are interested in, one of the easiest ways to find what's happening in your area is to visit the

How to keep your children active

Change4Life website: choose from adventure/outdoor, family life, martial arts and combat, team sports, disability sports and classes, fitness, general sports, non-sport activities and classes and water sports.

And don't forget, if you're outdoors and it's sunny, protect your child's skin from the sun's UV rays. Use a sunscreen with a minimum protection factor of SPF15 and a high star rating, and apply it regularly.

Children with asthma

If your child has asthma, you may be concerned about them exercising. But there's no reason why they shouldn't do any type of activity they like if their asthma is well controlled. After all, successful sports people such as David Beckham, Paul Scholes and Paula Radcliff have asthma too.

According to the charity Asthma UK, children with asthma should aim to do at least an hour of exercise every day, just like those who don't have asthma. The most important thing is to find activities they enjoy. The best activities for people with asthma, says the charity, are those that include short bursts of intense activity followed by less intense activity, such as the following:

- Rollerblading
- Skateboarding
- Football
- Hockey
- Netball
- Volleyball
- Badminton
- Short tennis

- Gymnastics
- Swimming

There's also no reason why children with asthma can't take part in school activities, including games and PE. But always make sure your school and its teachers are aware that your child has asthma, and that they have their reliever inhaler with them at all times, especially when they take part in PE or games. And if your child has had an asthma attack recently – or if anything concerning their asthma management or treatment has changed – keep their school informed.

Useful links

If you are experiencing any of the issues covered in this guide, in the first instance call our free helpline on 0808 801 0550. Our Advisors will listen without judging and will work with you as best they can to achieve a positive outcome.

If you prefer you can email: helpline@ltcharity.org.uk.org; . Visit our website: www.licensedtradecharity.org.uk; It's full of useful information about the kind of issues we know people who work in the licensed trade face.

Other sources of information

Change4Life

www.nhs.uk/Change4Life/Pages/be-more-active.aspx

For lots of fun and budget-friendly ideas on keeping your family healthy, including tips on being more active.

NHS Choices Live Well

Helpline: 0808 801 0550

Email: support@ltcharity.org.uk

licensedtradecharity.org.uk

Page 4

Registered Charity No. 230011

NOTE: This guide is not exhaustive. It has been produced by the Licensed Trade Charity to provide you with an overview of the issue in question. We are grateful to all specialist organisations who support our charity and are available to you should you be experiencing this particular issue.

Disclaimer: Licensed Trade Charity has used reasonable care in compiling and presenting this information but it does not assume liability for any errors or omissions in the content or any third party sources. The LTC expressly disclaims liability for errors or omissions.

How to keep your children active



www.nhs.uk/livewell/Pages/Livewellhub.aspx

Health and physical activity advice for adults and children.

Asthma UK

www.asthma.org.uk

Advice for people with asthma, including parents of children with asthma.

Helpline: 0808 801 0550

Email: support@ltcharity.org.uk

licensedtradecharity.org.uk

Page 5

Registered Charity No. 230011

NOTE: This guide is not exhaustive. It has been produced by the Licensed Trade Charity to provide you with an overview of the issue in question. We are grateful to all specialist organisations who support our charity and are available to you should you be experiencing this particular issue.

Disclaimer: Licensed Trade Charity has used reasonable care in compiling and presenting this information but it does not assume liability for any errors or omissions in the content or any third party sources. The LTC expressly disclaims liability for errors or omissions.