



Let Me Move... Watch Me Grow

(Ages 1-5 years)



Early childhood is the ideal time to lay the foundation for toddlers and preschoolers to be physically active. This is a time when children learn basic motor skills such as running, jumping and climbing. Young children love to move and need many opportunities to be physically active.

Key Principles to an Active Start

Young children should be active every day, both indoors and outdoors. The more daily physical activity a child gets, the more beneficial it is for them.

Toddlers (aged 1-2 years) and preschoolers (aged 3-4 years) should accumulate at least 180 minutes of physical activity at any intensity spread throughout the day. This should include a variety of activities in different environments, as well as activities that develop movement skills.

Encourage your child to move in all kinds of ways. Those movements are the building blocks to allow him or her to develop more complex movements.

Play is the primary form of physical activity for children up to school age. Toddlers and preschoolers are naturally active, so encourage this as much as possible.

The older children get, the more energetic play they need, such as hopping, jumping, skipping and bike riding. Children should progress toward at least 60 minutes of energetic play by 5 years of age.

Guidelines to Inactivity

For healthy growth and development, parents and caregivers should limit the time toddlers and preschoolers spend being inactive to no more than one hour at a time while awake. This includes prolonged sitting or being restrained (e.g., stroller, high chair).

For children under 2 years, screen time is not recommended. For children 2-4 years, screen time should be limited to less than one hour per day. Screen time includes TV, computer and electronic games.

Benefits of Physical Activity

- Is an important component of early brain development and learning
- Improves self-esteem
- Makes the heart, lungs, muscles and bones stronger
- Helps develop physical coordination, flexibility and balance
- Helps improve sleeping and eating habits



Development of Key Motor Skills

Over the years, toddlers and preschoolers master basic skills as they gain muscle control, balance, and coordination. Each new skill mastered allows a toddler or preschooler to progress to the next one. Motor skills such as running, jumping, kicking, throwing and catching are the building blocks for more complex movements.

Early Toddler Skills (12-24 months)	Walks independently, pulls toys while walking, stoops and gets back up, begins to run, kicks a ball
Older Toddler Skills (24-36 Months)	Balances one to two seconds on one foot, alternates feet up and down stairs, climbs well, throws ball overhand, runs and jumps well
Preschooler (3 to 4 yrs)	Hops and stands on one foot up to five seconds, walks up and down stairs with more skill (may use handrail for support), throws ball overhand, catches bounced ball, moves forward and backward with agility
Kindergarten (4 to 5 yrs)	Stands on one foot for 10 seconds or longer, throws and catches a ball, hops, somersaults, swings, skips, tosses beanbags into holes



Frequently Asked Questions

I have a 2 yr old and a 4 yr old. What are some examples of structured activities we can do together?

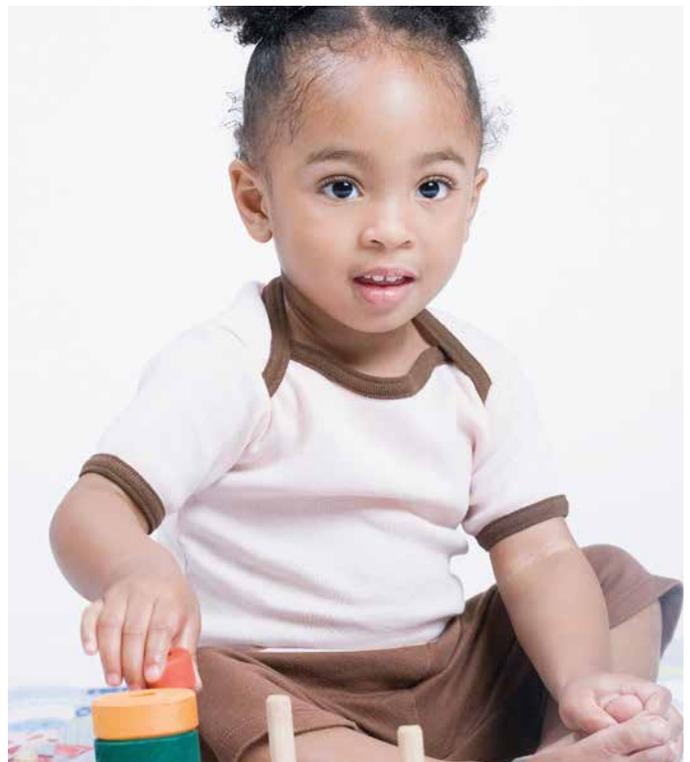
There are many activities you can do with both children. The key is making it fun! Try playing music and doing different movements – march, hop, wiggle or dance. You can play follow the leader games where you perform different movements and the children imitate you. Children at this age love stop-and-go walking and running games (e.g. tag or red light, green light).

How can I encourage my preschooler to be physically active?

As a parent or caregiver, you can encourage your child to be active by being **active yourself** and providing **adequate time** for physical activity. It is important to provide your preschooler with a physically interesting environment, both indoors and outdoors, that is safe for them to explore. Young children develop at different ages and stages, so choose activities that are appropriate for their skill level. When introducing a new activity, do so in a relaxed and reassuring way. Praise children for participating in an activity in order to build their confidence. Activities should be fun for the child. Finally, be active as a family - hiking, biking, and going to the park are great ways to be active together.

Should I enrol my 3 or 4-year-old in an organized sport program?

When looking for programs in which to enrol your preschooler, look for programs that stress developing the basic motor skills, such as swimming, not ones that focus on sport or competition. Usually preschoolers haven't had enough practice or experience to develop the necessary skills to participate in a competitive sport. Once a child has developed agility, coordination and strength, he or she will be better prepared for organized sport.



Suggested Reading

Fit Kids: A Practical Guide to Raising Healthy and Active Children from Birth to Teens

Mary Gavin, MD, Steven Dowson, MD & Neil Izenberg, MD; Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada; 2004.

Active Start for Healthy Kids: Activities, Exercises, and Nutritional Tips

Stephen J. Virgilio; Human Kinetics; 2006

365 Activities for Fitness, Food and Fun for the Whole Family, Sweet, Julia; 2001

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