

Physical Activity at Home

Why Promote Physical Activity?

One of the primary reasons for promoting physical activity among young children is that regular physical activity, combined with a balanced diet, can help prevent overweight among kids. As discussed in Module 1 of this document, childhood overweight is on the rise in the United States. Module 1, gives background information on childhood overweight and modules 4 and 5 give information on eating healthy at home. The material in this module will focus on physical activity at home.



Physical Activity Recommendations

Health experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that all children participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity most days of the week to maintain good health. Moderate physical activities are those that get your heart beating fast. Things like walking, bike riding, or mowing the lawn are examples of moderate physical activity. However, if your child is overweight or at-risk for overweight, increasing physical activity alone may not produce significant weight loss. Increased activity along with improved nutrition over a period of months will be necessary for noticeable changes in body fat.



All children need both planned activity and free play. The National Association of Sports and Physical Education (NASPE) recommends that preschool children get at least one hour of structured AND one hour of unstructured physical activity each day.

In addition, children should not remain inactive for more than an hour at a time. The only time kids should be not moving for more than an hour straight is when they are sleeping!

What Counts as Physical Activity?

Physical activity is any bodily movement produced by muscles that burns energy. So...any kind of moving counts as physical activity! Physical activity doesn't just mean exercises like jogging or push ups.... in reality, many things that kids consider "having fun" such as swimming, playing tag, or riding a bike are physical activities.

Physical activity can be moderate or vigorous. As mentioned earlier, moderate intensity physical activities include Things like walking or bike riding. Vigorous physical activities are things that really make you sweat. Running, aerobics, or shoveling snow might fall into this category.



Structured activity is when you make a specific time to be active and plan certain kinds of things to do during that time. Teaching

children how to move in all kinds of ways will help them enjoy physical activity. To make sure your kids are exposed to all kinds of movement you may want to plan specific physical activities to help them.

Young children should learn to jump, hop, skip, kick and throw. Take a little bit of time each day to help your kids learn and practice these activities. Make it fun by playing games that include these movements.

Unstructured Physical Activity



While structured physical activity is valuable, it is important for children to have time to play. Free play helps develop a child's imagination, creativity, body awareness and sense of space and dimension. Children learn about the world by moving around in it and exploring its wonder! Find a safe place near your home where your child can play with friends or siblings. If the weather is bad, provide soft objects like balls and bean bags for your child to play with indoors.

Examples of unstructured physical activity include a game of tag, climbing in a tree fort, pushing a friend on the swing, playing hide-and-go-seek, bike riding through the neighborhood or kicking a soccer ball around the yard.

Activate Your Family

The trick to increasing physical activity is to find things to do that are fun...when kids (and parents for that matter) are having fun, they forget about how hard they are working – because it isn't work, it's play!



Kids naturally love to move. As a parent you know how hard it is to get them to sit still! Use this love of movement to their advantage by encouraging your children to play.

Everyone needs physical activity to be healthy. When families are active together everyone benefits! Kids get to burn off their excess energy and parents enjoy the many health benefits of physical activity. As a parent, you are the role-model for your children...if they see you participate in regular physical activities they will be more likely to participate on their own as they get older. Plus, the extra time spent as a family unit helps build relationships and strong family bonds as well as pass down cultural values.



Try to be active as a family each day. Walk the dog together after dinner or go on a family bike ride to a local park or gym instead of watching T.V. You could assign each family member one night per week to be the "Coach of the Day" whose job is to organize or invent a game that evening!

Also, look for ways to incorporate movement into family events. Celebrate birthdays at the swimming pool or bowling alley. Schedule group games like volleyball, badminton, or touch football for summer family get-togethers. Try sledding, broom ball, or hockey during the winter.

Some of the best family physical activities are right outside your front door! Make use of Alaska's wonderful outdoor opportunities by doing active things like hiking, berry picking, or beach combing.

Get Outside

We all know that Alaskan winters can be very cold, but don't let that stop your activity fun! Kids love to be outside when there is snow on the ground and often don't even notice the chill in the air. As long as kids are dressed properly, provide and encourage cold weather activity.

Use snowy winter days to do physical activities like sledding, skiing, skating and snowman building. All of these activities are fun energy burners....kids will be doing healthy physical activity without even knowing it!

Indoor Fun

When the weather is just too cold or wet and you are forced indoors, find creative ways to keep kids moving. One way to do that is to adapt typical outdoor sports so they can be played indoors. For instance, you could play a game of "Socker" using a rolled-up sock as a ball and living room walls as goals!

Other fun indoor activities include having a treasure hunt, obstacle course, sit-up/push-up contests, arm wrestling contests, or pretend "ice skating" with sock feet on a linoleum floor. Another fun idea is to play music and create a new dance!

Children love animals! Here is an activity that will use your child's love of animals to learn new forms of movement. Simply collect pictures of different animals out of magazines or newspapers, paste the pictures on pieces of cardboard, then have your child imitate the movements of the animals.

If you don't have enough space at home for indoor games, consider using community physical activity facilities. Swimming pools and bowling alleys are great places to be active that often aren't too expensive. Schools often host "Open Gym" night and some schools have covered play areas you may be able to use. In addition, you may be able to walk the hallways of your local high school after school hours. Or, if there is a mall or large store in your town you could go there to walk and window shop.



Keep Kids Moving

Remember – children should not be inactive for more than an hour at a time unless they are sleeping.¹ On a typical week day sleep, school, playing and eating will occupy most of a child's day. However, there will be times during the week and especially on weekends when kids don't have much to do.

To reduce the amount of time your child spends inactive during free time, plan ahead and have several activities available for them to choose from. Playing outdoors, helping with household chores, reading and doing indoor games or crafts are all better options than just sitting around.

Weekends are when kids have the most free time and may tend to be inactive. To help kids get moving on the weekend days, plan a family hike or bike ride, or let them play outside both before and after lunch. Let kids brainstorm activity ideas during the week and make a written schedule for the weekend to post on the refrigerator.



Active Alternatives to Screen-time

Many studies have been done to identify the connection between television watching and childhood overweight. Research shows that as TV time increases, so do rates of overweight in teenagers. It's not clear whether this effect is due to TV taking the place of physical activity, or teens eating more while watching TV, or both.²



In Alaska, nearly 30% of high school students watch more than 3 hours of television on an average school day! Just imagine how many more hours are spent watching T.V. on weekends – not to mention video games and computers.³



Preschool children may have already developed a habit of watching television and playing video games. In our country the average child spends nearly 5 hours each day watching T.V. or playing video/computer games.⁴ The Association of American Pediatrics recommends that kids accumulate 2 hours or less each day of screen time.⁵

Try and curb these habits by setting limits on time spent in front of a screen. One way to monitor time spent watching television is to avoid putting a T.V. in a child's bedroom. Research shows that preschool children with a television in their bedroom watch an additional 4.8 hours of TV or videos every week and are more likely to be overweight than children without a bedroom T.V.⁶ Having young children watch T.V. in the living room allows you to monitor content as well as time spent watching television.

Believe it or not, it is possible to be active and get good activity ideas from watching television! When you and your child do watch T.V., consider watching a sporting event or outdoor recreation show and then go outside and try the activity.



Also, use those annoying commercial breaks to get your own quick workout...try having a family push-up or sit-up contest!

In addition, there are several programs targeted at children that include promotion of healthy behaviors. Sesame Street has regular lessons on healthy eating and Oscar the Grouch even sings the “Worm Workout Song” and encourages everyone watching to bend, twist and crawl along.

There are always times during the day when parents need time to get work done without the “help” of children. Identify these times during your day and plan fun activities that utilize a child’s imagination instead of relying on television or video games to distract them.

The time before the evening meal is usually one of those times. This is the perfect time for kids to play outside or have “clean up time” inside. If weather is bad or children are too young to play outside unsupervised, this can be “play time” when kids can color, play with blocks or Legos, or play board games.

If none of these is appealing to your child, have them join you in the kitchen and “cook” their own meal by combining ingredients you have set out for them in small containers. Or, have kids make their own pizza on a prepackaged crust with simple ingredients like cheese and pepperoni. When kids help in the kitchen they learn food preparation skills, become acquainted with new foods (which may increase the odds of actually trying them) and are decreasing time spent inactive.



Just Move!

As a parent remember that it is very important for kids to move as much as possible. Because children have a natural love of moving, your only job is to make sure that they stay safe and have fun doing it! Make sure that your children have time to play freely each day, but plan time in your schedule for structured activity as well.

Looking for places to be active in Alaska is as easy as looking out your window. Take advantage of local trails, beaches and mountains to keep your family active and healthy. When the weather is so bad that it’s not safe to be outdoors, think about using community facilities or just be creative in your own home. Either way, try to give your children positive experiences with physical activity so that they will continue to be active and enjoy a long, healthy life.



MODULE SIX REFERENCES

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