



Kids *in motion*



An Early Start to Physical Activity for Babies, Toddlers and Preschoolers



Healthy Kids,
Healthy Futures





Why is physical activity important for young children?

Babies, toddlers and preschoolers love to play and move which is great because being physically active every day helps young children:

- Grow – build and maintain healthy hearts and lungs, bones, muscles and joints.
- Learn and develop basic movement or motor skills like rolling over, crawling, walking, running, jumping, throwing or kicking. Children need to practise these skills because they don't just happen on their own.
- Learn that being active is fun.
- Develop confidence and a sense of accomplishment.
- Make friends and play with other children.
- Learn about their environment and how to solve problems.
- Maintain healthy weights.
- Have energy during the day and sleep better at night.
- Relax and relieve stress.
- Remain physically active as they get older, because physical activity will already be an important part of their life. This will help keep them healthy and prevent certain diseases.



How much physical activity do young children need?

Babies, toddlers and preschoolers should be active every day. Much of this physical activity will happen naturally as children play and explore the world around them. For you as parents and caregivers, the fun part is finding ways to support children's natural need to be active and doing it in a way that suits their age and stage of development.

You can do this in two ways:

- 1) Unstructured physical activity/play – children play freely on their own or with other children, and you are there to watch or supervise.
- 2) Structured physical activity/play – you plan or lead the activities. This way you get to play too!

Here are some suggestions on how much physical activity young children need¹:

Babies (birth to 12 months)

- should have many daily activities that let them play actively. These activities will occur through interactions with parents, siblings, family and caregivers.

Toddlers (12 to 36 months)

- should get at least 30 minutes of daily, structured physical activity/play, plus a minimum of 60 minutes of unstructured physical activity/play, ideally much more.

Preschoolers (3 to 5 years)

- should get at least 60 minutes of daily, structured physical activity/play, plus a minimum of 60 minutes of unstructured physical activity/play, ideally much more.

Activities don't have to happen all at once – they can and are more likely to happen throughout the day. If your baby, toddler or preschooler gets several short bursts of physical activity/play, they will have the total amount needed by the end of the day.

¹ According to the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NAPSE) guidelines for children. http://www.aahperd.org/NASPE/template.cfm?template=ns_active.html

Active Play, Every Day

Here are some ideas on how you can support and encourage your child or children to participate in active play every day.

- Make it fun. Focus on it, so they know ‘being active’ is the purpose.
- Use your imagination. You don’t need expensive toys or equipment. Everyday items, and public places and spaces, can be used creatively to meet your child’s needs.
- Make it safe.
- Set a good example. Be an active role model!
- Play along! Kids need to play and so do you. Involve the entire family.
- Praise and cheer them on, saying things like, “Way to Go!,” and “You Did It!” This will build their confidence and you’ll have fun seeing their little faces light up with happiness.
- Plan ahead. Keep items on hand so you can stop and play when there’s time between chores or activities (ex: a small foam ball in the diaper bag).
- Play outside in the spring, summer, fall and winter! Dress for the weather.
- Talk about physical activity. Teach children that it’s an important part of growing and staying healthy.
- Teach your child to try their best. Don’t worry about other kids’ bests. Celebrate and praise their efforts. That way, they will feel successful and know that true achievement comes from trying their best.
- Talk to your child’s doctor or therapist for ideas that can help your child grow and develop.

fun
safe





Active Play, Every Day (continued)

- Use equipment and space that promotes physical activity (ex: balls or riding toys, playgrounds or open areas like soccer fields).
- Introduce children to active role models in your family or community.
- Tell stories or read books with physical activity and nutrition themes. Encourage your child to get actively involved in the story by talking about what is happening, asking questions and encouraging the child to act out the story. Then plan fun, follow-up activities that reinforce the messages.
- Limit the amount of time spent on the computer and watching TV. Encourage your child to be an active TV watcher by suggesting they do the same actions the characters are doing, move to the music, or play along while watching.
- Provide a variety of activities. There are many ways your child can practise movements like walking, throwing or running. Repeat the activities they liked. Repetition is a great way to learn.

Ideas for Active Play, Every Day

While most children follow a basic development pattern, each child is unique and special, so they will grow and develop differently. Here are some ideas for active play. You know your child best so only try those activities that fit with what they're able to do. These activities will help your child grow and develop muscle strength, balance, co-ordination, spatial awareness, and work their heart and lungs – and they will have fun and learn while they play.

Babies *in motion* – from birth to 12 months

- **Move your baby's arms or legs when changing diapers.** Gently stretch or move your baby's arms and legs, up and down and cross them over. This will help them learn to lift and move their arms and legs.
- **Tummy time.** At about six weeks old, babies can be placed on their stomach when they are awake. Placing babies on their stomach will help them develop strength in their neck and body, which will help them learn to roll over, crawl, and walk. Try placing them on their stomach for a short time to begin with. As they get older, increase the amount of time they spend on their tummies. You may want to try "tummy time" several times a day. To help them enjoy being on their stomach, lie down on the floor facing them, cheer them on, or try shaking a rattle or a toy to attract their attention. Babies need supervision when they are on their tummies, in case they get tired and need to be picked up.



- **Hold out a toy for your baby to grab.** It might take a few tries for your baby to grasp it. Look for easy-to-grasp toys that are safe and fun for your baby. For example, a set of plastic toy keys on a ring will give your baby a lot of different ways they can hold it and explore.
- **“Swim” in the bathtub.** When your baby is old enough (probably 4-6 months), fill the tub with warm (not hot) water and climb in the tub with your baby. Help your baby float on their back (with your hand supporting their head), then move your baby back and forth through the water (as if they’re swimming). Your baby will probably start kicking their feet and splashing the water. As you know, it’s important to never leave your baby unattended in the tub.
- **Sitting and standing.** When your baby is strong enough to support their head, they can practise sitting and standing with your help. Hold your baby’s hands and slowly pull them from lying down to a sitting or standing position.
- **Kick It!** Lay your baby on their back and let them kick things that make a noise. Hold up a piece of newspaper or aluminum foil so your baby can kick it and listen to the noise.
- **Play with words and actions.** Ask your baby, “How big are you?” Then lift their arms high above their head and say, “So big!” Soon they will do it themselves. You can also add songs that involve actions like clapping. Try ‘Pat-a-cake’ or ‘If you’re happy and you know it.’ You might have to help your baby clap at first. For more ideas, ask family members or an elder to teach you some songs, or check out songbooks, tapes and CDs from your local library or bookstore.
- **Crawling.** Once your baby is getting close to crawling, place a favourite toy in front of them and encourage them to crawl to it. Make a game out of moving it (a little farther away each time) so they can keep crawling towards it. Babies love to crawl through things. Buy or make tunnels (use cardboard boxes opened on both sides) for your baby to crawl through. Call to your baby from one end of the box/tunnel or crawl through yourself. This will encourage them to follow.

- **Cardboard wagon.** Turn a small cardboard box into a wagon by making a small hole in the side. Push a thick rope through and tie knots on both ends. Now your baby can pull the box towards them or drag it behind as they crawl. Show them how to fill it with toys or other safe items like socks. Your baby will enjoy taking the items in and out.
- **You be the toy.** Get down on the floor with your baby and let them climb over you. You may have to help balance them. Or sit your baby on your knee and gently bounce them up and down. Use your imagination – take your baby on a horsey ride, elephant ride, airplane ride, etc. Talk to them about it as you bounce them.



Toddlers *in motion* – from 12 months to 3 years old

- **Sing songs that have actions associated with them.** It's always fun to incorporate instruments such as drums, a guitar or a fiddle. There are many examples to pick from. Ask family members or an elder to teach you some songs, or check the library or the Internet for other ideas. One example is to sit facing each other and hold hands. Then rock back and forth while singing:

*Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream.
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a dream.*

- **Bowling.** Set up a bowling alley using empty milk cartons. Have your toddler roll a soft ball towards the cartons and try to knock them over. Count the cartons while you play to help your child learn about numbers.
- **If you build it, they will play!** Help your child build a fort, castle or obstacle course by using cushions, pillows, blankets, sheets, chairs or boxes. Take turns playing and climbing through.
- **Let's walk!** Once your child is able to walk, encourage them to walk in all different directions and ways – backwards, on their tiptoes, up and down hills, or other ways you think of. (ex: Show your child how to tiptoe, then pretend you are quietly sneaking up on something, like a cat.)
- **Follow the leader.** Let your toddler take the lead. Set aside a good chunk of time (it will take longer than you think because your toddler is learning so many things). Let your child guide you on a walk with no destination in sight. Stop to explore and learn about everything around you. You can play this game inside or outside.
- **Jack-in-the-box.** Show your toddler how to curl up into an imaginary box, then spring up when the 'pretend' lid is lifted. Singing a song goes well with this activity.

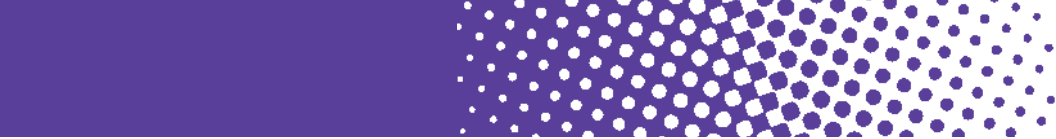
*Jack in the box
So small and still
Won't you come out?
Yes I will!*

- **Tell stories.** Stories are a great way to entertain and teach your child about things that are important to you, like history, traditions and beliefs. Have your child act out or imitate the stories you tell. Whether it's a story or legend about a snowbird, bear, beaver or the northern lights – encourage your child to imitate the movement of the animal by running, jumping, galloping, bending, stretching, twisting, turning and swinging. Your child can pretend to be a bear stomping through the forest, a snake slithering through the grass, a bird flying through the air, a penguin waddling across the snow, or a wolf running fast along the ground.
- **Play catch.** Give your child a fairly large, soft ball and encourage them to touch, hold, toss, and finally throw it to you. Begin by encouraging them to roll the ball back and forth. Most children are older than two before they can catch a ball. If you think your child is ready to try to play catch, show them how to stretch their arms out in front of their body. Stand close and gently toss the ball so it lands in their arms. Then say, “Hug the ball,” to encourage them to catch the ball.
- **Choo Choo Train!** At a certain age, toddlers like to fill things up and lug them around. Whether it's a basket, bag or wagon, they love to load them with toys or other safe items. Give your child a bag or basket that is easy for them to fill and pull. Tell them it's a train and teach them to say “choo-choo” as they pull some toys or items all over your home. Play along as your child fills and refills the bag or basket and lugs it around like a “choo-choo” train.



Preschoolers *in motion* – from 3 to 5 years old

- **Just dance!** Encourage your child to make up a dance to a favourite song. Or teach your child dances that have meaning to you, your family and/or culture. Music is a fun way to teach movement and rhythm – as well, it gets preschoolers to work their muscles, heart and lungs.
- **Play games.** Games are a great way to incorporate physical activity into your preschooler's day. Expensive play equipment is not needed for many basic fun games. You can teach your child games you remember playing as a child, games like 'tag,' 'hide and seek,' or 'Simon says.' Play 'Simon says' to get children to run on the spot or do jumping jacks. Young children will enjoy learning these fun-filled games, especially the games that are important to you, your family and/or culture.
- **Jumping.** It's good for preschoolers to practise jumping as it will build strength, co-ordination and balance. Lay a rope or rolled-up towel on the ground and get your child to practise jumping over it, back and forth. You can pretend it's a river or a small animal they are jumping over. When your child is ready, you can widen the space they're jumping. Together, count how many times they can jump back and forth.
- **"Do This, Do That."** Get your child to copy your movement when you say, "Do This." When you say, "Do That," they must not move. Make the changes quickly. Vary your actions so your child practises different movements. Have them pretend they are an airplane or bird flying through the air, balancing on one foot with their arms open wide. Switch the game around – let your child lead you through some actions and movements.
- **Obstacle course.** Set up an outdoor obstacle course and have your preschooler go through it from beginning to end. Build in fun and variety. For instance, have your child walk across a low plank (place a piece of solid wood on two crates), followed by walking or running with a bean bag balanced on their head, followed by a somersault. Include a ball and have your child toss it into a basket. Or use wet sponges to toss on hot summer days.
- **All the World's a Stage.** Pretending is just one of the skills that your preschooler is developing. They use their imagination to create drama as they play. Everyday items become something else. Build your child's imagination into physical activity/play. Whether it's dinosaurs or superheroes, have your child make up and act out a story based on their interests. In-



clude props and costumes. A pillowcase or scarf makes a good cape or bag. (ex: let your child be the superhero and have them go on a long journey to rescue you. Let your child use their imagination to create the obstacles they encounter on their way.)

- **Little helpers.** Turn chores into fun and movement. Throw a big pile of laundry on the bed and call – Laundry Party! Get your child to help sort the clothes into piles for each family member and carry their own clothes and put them away. Turn on some high-energy music to make it more fun.
- **Wheelbarrow.** Have your child lie on their stomach with their hands flat on the floor in front and their legs straight back. Stand between your child’s legs and lift them up, firmly supporting their legs and thighs. In this position, help them move forward, as they walk with their hands. Count to see how long they can walk like a wheelbarrow.
- **Scavenger hunt.** Don’t just walk... explore! Pick three to five things that your preschooler can look for and find. Say things like, “Show me two birds, one ant, and something that is blue.” Teach them or tell them stories about the things you picked. This will help them learn and get them ready for school.
- **Swimming.** Swimming is a fun physical activity that can be enjoyed throughout life. If you want to get your child involved in organized activities, swimming is a great option for your preschooler. Swimming with your baby or toddler can help introduce them to water, build confidence and teach water safety. The Canadian Pediatric Society recommends that children be at least four years old before they take part in individual swimming lessons. All young children should be supervised by an adult when they are around water, whether it’s a bathtub, pool or open water. It is recommended that you are always “within arm’s reach.”



Healthy Eating Tips for Toddlers and Preschoolers

Toddlers and preschoolers need to eat often – up to 6 times a day, with 3 meals and up to 3 small snacks. Plan meal and snack times so a routine can develop. Here are some other tips to encourage healthy eating.

- Parents and caregivers are in charge of providing healthy food. Offering healthy foods will help children develop a liking for them and influence what they like, and choose to eat, for years to come.
- Keep healthy foods in the home. That way, it will be a lot easier to offer healthy food.
- Serve the healthy foods you like, so you can set a good example by eating them yourself.
- When possible, eat meals together as a family.
- Serve small amounts or portions.
- For toddlers, cut food into small pieces. For preschoolers, make the food look good and fun to eat. For example, arrange food in the shape of a face or flower.
- Offer a variety of foods. Include ones you know they like along with some new healthy foods.





- Be flexible! Offer healthy foods but let your child choose which ones to eat, how much to eat or whether to eat at all. This way they will learn to eat when they are hungry and stop when they are full. This is an important skill to having a healthy weight and body.
- Give your child many opportunities to feed themselves, first with their fingers and then with child-size forks or spoons. Offer your help when needed.
- Don't use food as a reward or bribe your child into eating what you want. Don't say, "If you have two more bites, I will give you a cookie." This sends a message that snacks or sweets are more valuable than nutritious foods or mealtime. Instead, focus on something other than the food like a song or a game and then go back to encouraging the food.
- Just keep trying. Don't be discouraged if your child doesn't like a food the first time. Children are naturally slow to accept new tastes and textures. It may take many more times before they try the food.
- Get your child to safely help in the kitchen when you make meals or snacks.
- Serve the drink after they have started eating. Having a drink right before a meal can make them less willing to try new foods at mealtime because they are less hungry.
- The best drinks for toddlers and preschoolers are milk and water.

For information on feeding babies from birth to 12 months, see the guide: Feeding Baby Solid Foods at www.gov.mb.ca/health/nutrition/pubs/solidfoods.pdf.

Play Safe

Trouble and injury can happen quickly, even in the short amount of time it takes to answer the phone or grab the laundry. Therefore, wherever your child plays, it must be safe. Here are some general tips on how your child can be both active and safe.

- Supervision is important because toddlers and preschoolers seem to have no fear, and they are still learning balance, co-ordination and judgement.
- At home, make at least one room safe for your child to explore. Use gates and other safety equipment to do this.
- Try to find a balance between letting them try new things and keeping them safe. For example, at the park, move your child to equipment that is appropriate for their age. This way they can try something new but still play actively and safely.
- Talk about safety and teach simple safety rules. Talk about things like street safety so they learn not to run into the street.



explore
active

Involve the Whole Family

The time you spend being active together will help you connect with your child and bond as a family. It will be more fun, and a lot easier, if your family works together to be physically active and healthy. This means that an adult needs to take the lead. Here are some tips for being active together.

- Set a good example. Take care of yourself by being physically active. This way you will have more energy as a parent and caregiver.
- Talk about why you are active and why you eat healthy foods. Focus on how it makes you feel and not on how it makes you look.
- Choose activities the whole family can enjoy. Make them a part of your daily routine. This way your child will start being active at a young age, and will continue to be active as they grow older.
- Be active together in small bursts. Take a few minutes before or after dinner to play actively.
- When possible, eat meals together as a family.
- Get active with other parents and caregivers! Contact your local community club, recreation office, public swimming pool, or fitness centre to see if they offer parent-child classes or playgroups. These provide a great way to meet other new parents or caregivers in your community, while enjoying some physical activity with your little one!



You Can Help Manitoba Get “in motion”

In motion is a provincial strategy to help all Manitobans, including children, youth, families, adults and older adults, make physical activity part of their daily lives for health and enjoyment. The provincial government has joined with community partners in the areas of physical activity, health, healthy living, recreation, sport, and education to raise activity levels and reduce barriers to physical activity.

For more information, visit www.manitobainmotion.ca or call 1-866-788-3648.

A man and a young child are sitting in a large pile of autumn leaves. The man, wearing a blue button-down shirt, is smiling and looking towards the camera. The child, wearing a blue sweater and red shirt, is laughing with their mouth open. The background is white with several light orange circles of varying sizes. The text 'play grow' is written in a light green, lowercase, sans-serif font to the right of the man and child.

play
grow

Get it on the Web!

The following websites provide more information:

Manitoba *in motion*: www.manitobainmotion.ca

Winnipeg *in motion*: www.winnipeginmotion.ca

Healthy Child Manitoba: www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild

Healthy Start for Life (Dietitians of Canada): www.dietitians.ca/healthystart

Aboriginal Canada Portal: www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca

Active Healthy Kids: www.activehealthykids.ca

Safe Kids Canada: www.safekidscanada.com

Invest in Kids: www.investinkids.ca

Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a disability: www.ala.ca

Heart and Stroke Foundation: www.heartandstroke.ca

IMPACT Injury Prevention Centre: www.hsc.mb.ca/impact

Canadian Paediatric Society: www.cps.ca

Go2 Calgary: www.go2calgary.com/target_groups_pre-school

Kids Stop – Indian and Northern Affairs Canada:
www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ks/index_e.html

Aboriginal Children's Circle of Early Learning: www.accel-capea.ca

Sesame Street: www.sesameworkshop.org

Games Kids Play: www.gameskidsplay.net

Find out where you can access internet services in your community. Often schools, libraries, resource centres, or recreation offices will have free access to internet services.





Manitoba in motion

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