WHAT DOES MY CHILD GAIN FROM BEING MORE ACTIVE?

Just like for adults, increased physical activity has been linked to better overall health and reduced chronic disease in children. But there are some other really key advantages to ensuring your child is physically active including:

- Better sleep
- Better academic performance
- Improved ability to handle physical and emotional challenges
- Improved brain development, function and creativity
- May even improve health conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

It can be confusing trying to figure out which guidelines to follow (2-7). Your safest bet and easiest way to remember is “60-60-60” since the most comprehensive guidelines recommend 120 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day (60 minutes of structured and 60 minutes of unstructured) and sedentary time no longer than 60 minutes at a time (see Sedentary Behavior). Providing 120 mins of activity, however, doesn’t just mean increasing recess or outdoor play time. Studies have shown that this does not necessarily increase physical activity for every child. For already active kids, more playground time can mean more active play. But for some children who typically choose to do more sedentary options they may just be sedentary longer.

CHILD CARE VS. HOME

A common problem with ensuring your child gets enough physical activity is that he/she is not always in your care. If your child is in a child care facility, you can’t assume the teacher is meeting the activity minutes for the day. On the contrary, teachers cannot assume the child is achieving his/her physical activity goals at home. So it is important to communicate openly with your child’s teacher and together understand the physical activity daily practices of your child. Additionally, while teachers promote physical activity in the classroom, as a parent, your role at home is crucial. Reinforce fundamental movement skills and provide additional opportunities for physical activity.

Contrary to popular belief, studies show that children in child care programs are generally NOT active! So what does this mean for parents? Continuous at-home involvement is the key!

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120 MINUTES WELL SPENT!
While 120 minutes seems like a long time, it can be broken up into shorter bouts of activity. Some of that activity (60 minutes) should be spent doing structured activity, meaning “adult-led” physical activities with an intended goal or outcome. The other 60 minutes (or more) may be unstructured or “active free-play.” Finally, children should not be sedentary for longer than 60 minutes. Be sure to get children up and get them moving throughout the day!

STRUCTURED PLAY
Structured play is an organized or “guided” activity, with intentional goals or objectives that give children opportunities to practice key fundamental movement skills such as those found in state or local Pre-K standards. These activities can also teach children their colors, numbers or letters.

Examples Include:
- Hopscotch – uses numbers to teach a child to hop on one foot;
- Red Light, Green Light – uses colors to teach a child to step forward and backward;
- Dance – uses various musical genres and lyrical messaging to teach a child simple dance patterns;
- Sports Drills – teaches physical motor skills such as dribbling, throwing or catching a ball

UNSTRUCTURED PLAY
Unstructured play is free time playing on the school playground, at the park, or with the neighborhood friends in a guided and safe environment. Sometimes this means providing sports equipment, playground equipment, stencils on the ground or other child appropriate props for them to choose from. The child is free to do whatever kind of physical activity he/she chooses. Unstructured play helps children develop their sense of independence and social interaction. Encourage your child to play outdoors as much as possible, whether at a playground, park, or on nature walk.

WHAT IS MODERATE-TO-VIGOROUS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?
What does the recommendation of “moderate-to-vigorous physical activity” mean? “Moderate-to-vigorous” refers to large body movement activities that significantly increase breathing and use arms and/or legs (not just hands).

Moderate Physical Activity
- Brisk walking
- Playing on outdoor play equipment, moving about, swinging, climbing, or tumbling
- Playing hopscotch, 4-square, kickball, or ball games, bicycling, swimming.

Vigorous Physical Activity
- Running, hopping, galloping, hiking or walking quickly up a hill
- Playing, running, or jumping games
- Playing tag or playing chase
- Doing jumping jacks
- Dancing or skipping to music
- Playing sports such as soccer or basketball

REFERENCES