



# DON'T JUST SIT, AND SIT, AND SIT!

## Reducing Sedentary Behavior

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**S**edentary behavior is not a lack of a positive health behavior but rather it is itself a negative health behavior

### WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE CONSIDERED SEDENTARY?

Sedentary activities most often understood are screen time activities such as watching TV, playing video games or sitting at a computer or smart phone. But it can also include other activities like reading, playing cards, driving in a car or bus or sitting at a desk during school or work time. Sedentary activities are those that do not significantly use arms or legs to increase activity levels such as sitting, standing, reading, playing a board game, riding in a wagon or drawing. So while it is important for a child to do a puzzle, sit and build blocks or read a book, these are still sedentary activities and should be broken up with a physical activity at least every 60 minutes.



Sedentary behaviors are those that occur during waking hours and have a very low level of activity, such as sitting or lying down. Being sedentary can result in more sitting and less time spent being physically active which can lead to obesity and greater risk for having diabetes and other chronic health problems as an adult.<sup>1</sup>

### BEING SEDENTARY VS. NOT DOING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Saying that “a person sits a lot” isn’t the same thing as saying “a person doesn’t exercise very much.” They are like two separate bank accounts. In one account, you keep track of how much time you spend being physically active and the other account tracks how much time you spend sitting. Just like different accounts can have different amounts, a child can play outside for one hour and put an hour of physical activity into their account; but, if they sit in front of a TV the rest of the day, they still put several hours of sitting into the other account.

Studies show in the past few years, children and youth are sitting a lot more than they used to and specific populations are at risk such as lower income families, African American and Latino populations.<sup>1</sup>

As adults, we may know that exercise is important for us too, but we should also include short bouts of physical activity throughout our day (e.g. 5 minutes every hour) beyond just a visit to the gym after work. A gym workout doesn’t eliminate the health effects of sitting all day. In one study of healthy adults who met the daily physical activity requirements, sitting and watching TV was still positively associated with a number of health risks.<sup>2</sup>

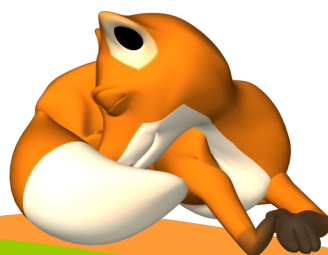


Many states have standards requiring children to receive moderate-vigorous physical activity periods as well as limit sedentary time other than meals, snacks, and naps.



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Excess screen time has a unique set of conditions all of its own beyond obesity, such as decreased creativity, eye problems, anxiety, depression and negative associations with learning and other cognitive processes.



## AREN'T CHILDREN NATURALLY ACTIVE?

Many preschoolers spend considerable time at organized out-of-home care, such as pre-schools, child care centers, and family child care homes. While these settings provide excellent opportunities to promote physical activity and limit time spent being sedentary,<sup>4</sup> studies show that children spend up to 87% of their time in early care and education (excluding naps) being sedentary.<sup>5</sup> It is important for parents and teachers to work closely together and ensure children have sufficient activity levels in both home and school settings.

Factors that influence sedentary behavior in the classroom or on the playground include not enough space (indoors or outdoors); bad weather (snow, rain, heat); limited equipment (e.g. must share with other classes) or unsafe or broken playground equipment, lack of teacher involvement (motivation, skill, personality, teaching style); and children who might be uninterested, overweight and or lack motor skills.<sup>6</sup>

Preschoolers should not be sedentary for more than 60 mins at a time except when sleeping.<sup>3</sup>



## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Requires involvement from both parents and teachers!

- If weather permits, provide daily periods of outdoor play
- Provide parent or teacher-led physical activity sessions at home or in preschools - not just free play
- Teach children movement skills, don't just expect them to "figure it out"
- Provide enough materials and working equipment to avoid excessive competition and long waiting periods for sharing
- Find fun games and activities suitable for all children regardless of weight status, ability, or skill level
- Avoid elimination games and ensure children are active and inclusive
- Create opportunities for physical activity during lesson plans and times of transition or waiting
- Look for indoor activities such as dancing or doing a treasure hunt
- Allow children who cannot sleep to play quietly during nap time

Children become more sedentary as they get older, so early intervention is crucial to establish and maintain a healthy lifestyle in the early years.<sup>4</sup>

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