



# REACH FOR THE STARS!

## Flexibility

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### IT'S IMPORTANT!

**Flexibility** is an important part of a child's fitness and includes movements like bending, twisting and stretching. These activities allow the muscles and joints to move easily through their full range of motion. Range of motion refers to the full movement potential of a joint such as its range of flexion and extension, or how far you can move your limbs without straining. Large body movements are critical to promote flexibility. Examples of large body movements include: climbing a slide, tumbling, swinging and hanging from bars (Note: while a child using his/her own weight to hang on the monkey bars is safe, swinging or twirling a child by their arms is not safe).

### BUT AREN'T YOUNG CHILDREN ALREADY FLEXIBLE?

Yes! Most preschoolers are already flexible; however, learning to maintain their healthy, flexible muscles is important as they approach adolescence. Imagine the importance for children looking to play sports or do individual activities such as dance, gymnastics, or martial arts. This may be especially true for boys! Girls are generally more flexible than boys at every age, but these differences are particularly noticeable during adolescence. Children's muscles become tighter around puberty because of their rapid bone growth. This rapid growth causes them to lose some flexibility.

### HOW TO STRETCH

Children should stretch, but not so far that it *hurts*. It is important to teach your child, slow, gradual stretching, as opposed to fast movements, which are not recommended for young children. Use visual images to teach stretching (e.g. pretend to "pull a carrot from the patch," or "pick an apple from the tree").



### Why some children begin to lose flexibility:

- As children grow, their muscles may not grow at the same rapid rate as their bones. This can cause muscles to be tight and inflexible.
- If children become more sedentary by reading, watching TV or spending time on games, computers and smart phones, their muscles become stiff, decreasing their flexibility.

### FIT STRETCHING INTO DAILY ACTIVITIES

Children can also stretch before or after doing physical activities such as running or kicking a ball. But for young children, it is best to incorporate stretching into their activities or during transition times, such as pretending to:

- Climb a fireman's ladder
- Bend over to pick flowers or sway like a tree
- Move their body into the shape of numbers or letters of the alphabet

### REFERENCES

2018 Physical Activity Guidelines Scientific Report for youth: Ch.7" Department of Human and Health Services, 2018, [health.gov/our-work/physical-activity/current-guidelines/scientific-report](https://health.gov/our-work/physical-activity/current-guidelines/scientific-report).



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