

Idaho Falls Pediatrics

Exercise for Kids

Why is exercise important?

Most children love to run, jump, climb, and play games. Outdoor activities give kids the chance to use up some of their energy, develop coordination, and build strength and confidence. Unfortunately, computers, video games and television, are taking up more and more of children's leisure time. As our kids spend more time inside and are less active, they are at higher risk for becoming overweight, feeling tired or lazy, and losing muscle tone.

How much exercise does my child need?

It is recommended that children get at least 60 minutes of exercise every day. It does not have to be done all at once. Short 10 to 15 minute spurts of activity work well too. If your child is not used to exercising very much, have him or her work up gradually to this level of activity.

How can I help my child get more exercise?

- Be a role model. Children who are part of a family that has fun doing activities together learn to love the feeling of being active. If you have fun exercising your child will notice and want to do it too. However, do not encourage your child to do adult types of exercise that are not right for children such as using a treadmill, stair-stepping, power walking, endurance running, or weight-lifting.
- Have your child join a team. Encourage your child to get involved in school sports, dance classes, or gymnastics. Basketball and soccer are good sports for even young children to learn. If your school doesn't offer anything, try community resources, such as YMCA or your local parks and recreation district.
- Try to find an activity your child enjoys. Be sensitive to your child's feelings. If your child feels uncomfortable playing certain sports or exercising in front of a group, try to find something that is more suitable. If the exercise is not fun, your child will not do it.

- Find a program for your overweight child. If your child has been diagnosed as severely overweight, you can check with your health care provider or child's school to see if there is a local exercise group or program that works with overweight kids.

What if my child doesn't like team sports?

For children who don't want to participate in organized sports or classes, finding ways to get them moving can be more of a challenge. However, there are some forms of exercise that can be done alone or with the family. Your child may enjoy:

- biking
- walking or hiking
- skating
- swimming
- strength training (for older preteens and teens).

Do activities as a family. Go out for a walk in the evening. Smaller children enjoy riding or skating alongside their parents as they walk or jog. You could also go out after dinner and play a game of catch, jump rope, or hopscotch. Kids are often more willing and excited to exercise when mom, dad, or older siblings are doing it with them. Try to plan weekends where the whole family joins in doing something active.

Active chores can also get kids moving, such as

- raking leaves or mowing the grass
- washing the car or windows
- sweeping
- vacuuming
- walking the dog
- simple gardening.
- For those children who resist outdoor exercise, consider exercise videotapes developed just for kids. There is a wide selection of these tapes and your child may prefer this type of activity. For a catalog of exercise videos, go to <http://www.collagevideo.com>.

*NOTE: This information is provided as a public educational service. The information does not replace any of the instructions your physician gives you. If you have a medical emergency please call 911 or call the Hospital at (208) 529-6111. If you have questions about your child's care, please call Idaho Falls Pediatrics at (208) 522-4600.