



Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children

Provider Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program

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ACTIVE PLAY TIPS



Provide Opportunities for Active Play Every day



Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children: Provider Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program

Active play and movement are important for every child's growth, health, development, and learning.

Although they may seem to be active and energetic, most children do not get the amount of physical activity they need. Research shows that young children in child care still spend a lot of their time sitting or lying down. Children should not be seated or still for more than 15 minutes at a time, except during meals or naps.

Children need a healthy balance of high-energy active play like running and climbing, as well as passive play like sitting in the sand box. Children spend many hours each day in your child care program, so providing the recommended amount of active play is important in helping children establish healthy habits.



How much time should be planned for active play every day?

Every child care program should promote children's active play every day. Time planned for outdoor play and physical activity depends on the age group and weather conditions. Vary activities between **structured play** (led by the adult caregiver) and **free play** (not led by an adult).

- ▶ **Toddlers (12 months to 3 years old)** Provide 60 to 90 minutes per day for moderate to vigorous physical activity.
- ▶ **Preschoolers (3 to 6 years old)** Provide 90 to 120 minutes per day for moderate to vigorous physical activity.



Moderate and **vigorous** physical activity will make children breathe harder and make their hearts beat faster than when they are not active.

Moderate Physical Activity

- Walking
- Playing on outdoor play equipment, moving about, swinging, or climbing
- Playing hopscotch, 4-square, or kickball

Vigorous Physical Activity

- Running, jogging, skipping, race-walking, walking quickly up a hill
- Running games
- Jumping rope, doing jumping jacks, jumping games

Active play time does not have to occur in a single session. Short bursts of activity work well for young children.

Plan these activities throughout the course of the day in 10- to 20-minute intervals. For example: 15 minutes of dancing after naptime and 20 minutes of free play on the playground before lunch.



What types of active play opportunities should I offer?

Children can enjoy skipping, climbing, dancing, and jumping. Daily active play, along with a healthy diet, is important for growing at a healthy weight. Active play helps children develop a variety of large muscle skills. All children should participate in:

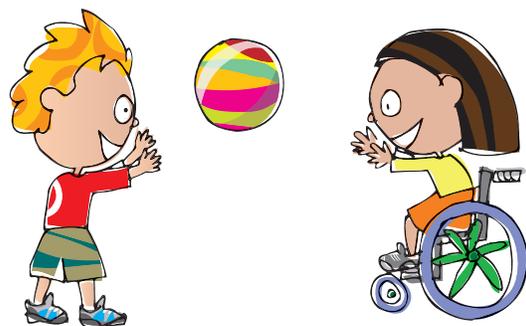
- ▶ **Outdoor play two to three times each day**, depending on the weather.
- ▶ **Noncompetitive activities and games led by adults** that encourage movement two or more times during the day.
- ▶ **Noncompetitive activities that help children develop and practice movement skills** that involve large muscle groups and whole body movement.



How can I help children be physically active every day?

- ▶ **Be a good role model.** Participate with children in activities and show them that you enjoy active play every day.
- ▶ **Be weather-ready.** When weather is too severe for outdoor play, dance to music indoors and tell or read stories that children act out physically.
- ▶ **Create opportunities for safe active play indoors and outdoors.** Use toys and equipment that are the right size for the age of the children. This might include bean bags, push toys, building blocks, tricycles, and bicycles. Children may be playing with certain toys for the first time. Show children how to play with these toys safely.
- ▶ **Use space wisely.** Many games and activities meant for outdoors and large spaces can be changed for use in limited, indoor spaces. For example, use colored masking tape to create pathways for children to follow as they jump or walk.
- ▶ **Keep children moving.** Encourage all children to participate by playing games that do not have them sitting still for a long period of time or “out” of the game early.
- ▶ **Help everyone be active.** Plan activities that allow all children the opportunity to play, including those with special needs.

Note: Strollers, high chairs, harnesses, and leashes limit children’s ability to move. Infants and children need physical activity for development of muscles and movement skills, so moving around and exploring their environment without physical restraints are critical.



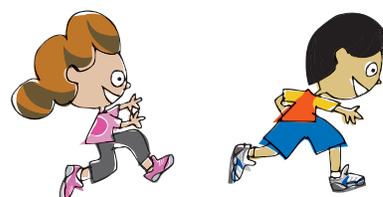
Activities

How can I add more active play in my child care program?

Think about your weekly activity schedule. Add more active play to every day! Which of these activity ideas will you try with the 2- to 6-year-old children in your care? Put a check mark next to the ones that you will try next week.

- Allow kids to roll, pass, or kick balls to each other.** Play catch with a soft or bouncy ball.
- Create an obstacle course.** Children love to tumble over pillows, crawl through open boxes, and jump into hula hoops.
- Set up relay races or jumping games.** Dance to music or sing songs about what they are learning (for example: body parts, fruits and vegetables, or colors). Play tag, chasing games, “red light, green light,” or “musical frogs” (similar to musical chairs but with “lily pads” or pillows on the floor). Try **noncompetitive games** where **all** children play, instead of games where children **wait** to play or must be picked to participate.
- Play Octopus Tag by drawing two lines at least 20 feet apart.** When the “octopus” in the middle says “hungry!”, the other children (the “fish”) should try to cross to the other side while the octopus tries to tag them. When a fish is tagged, he becomes the octopus’s arm and has to hold hands with the octopus, working with him to try to tag the other fish. The last fish left wins!
- Add fun to games by using pool noodles, beach balls, and hula hoops.** Try *Noodle Limbo*, *Cooperation Carry*, or *Musical Hoops*. Visit www.headstartbodystart.org for ideas.
- Set up a hula hoop game.** With all children standing in a single file line, give the first child in the line one hula hoop to hold over his or her head. Children will pull the hula hoop down over their bodies to the floor, step out of it, and give the hoop to the next person in line.
- Act out different animals** – hop like a rabbit, jump like a kangaroo, or waddle like a duck!
- Teach children math, science, and language concepts** through games involving movement. For example, children can learn to count by tossing bean bags into a bowl.
- Plan a “movement parade.”** March around the room or outside, while calling out different movements children can do: hop, skip, leap, twirl, twist, jump, stomp, and more.
- Provide two or more 5- to 10-minute periods of adult-led active play** or games that promote physical activity every day. Try “follow-the-leader” or walk in your neighborhood or park. Play musical movement games, such as “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes,” “Hokey Pokey,” and “If You’re Happy and You Know It.”
- See the *Let’s Move Child Care Web site* <http://healthykidshealthyfuture.org/content/hkhf/home/activities.html> for more activity ideas.**

List some other ideas you have for active play.





My Notes:



Encourage Active Play and Participate With Children



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Active play is physical activity. Engaging in active play with children is good role-modeling, and a great way to relieve stress.

Children learn behaviors from adults. Encouraging children to be physically active each day can help them develop a positive attitude toward movement, dance, sports, and other physical activity. Playing actively with children in your care can help them develop healthy habits.



Why is it important to encourage active play?

By moving more and sitting less, children learn to live in a healthful way. When children participate in active play, they develop their large muscles. Large muscle development is important for movements such as walking, balancing, sitting up straight, kicking, jumping, lifting, reaching, and throwing a ball. Large muscle development also supports the development of small muscles, which helps with skills such as holding small objects and turning pages in a book.

Active play also develops children's confidence in their ability to be physically active. You should encourage active play every day because:

- ▶ **Active play** helps children build their bones.
- ▶ **Habits are learned early in life**, so being active while in child care can create lifelong physical activity habits.
- ▶ **Children may spend a lot of time at home in front of televisions** and computers instead of playing actively. Give them good habits while they are in your care!



What should I do to encourage active play?

To promote children's active play, **you** can:

- ▶ **Participate with children** during active play time.
- ▶ **Plan and encourage physical activities** that are appropriate and safe.
- ▶ **Lead activities two or more times per day** that promote children's physical movement.
- ▶ **Encourage movement** by getting children actively moving often.
- ▶ **Wear clothing and footwear that permits easy and safe movement**, and let families know to dress children in appropriate clothing and footwear. (See the *Promote Active Play Through Written Policies and Practices* tip sheet on page 69 for more information.)
- ▶ **Limit "screen time,"** such as TV and DVD viewing, video games, recreational computer use, and other electronic devices. (See the *Limit Screen Time Tip Sheet* on page 73 for more information.)



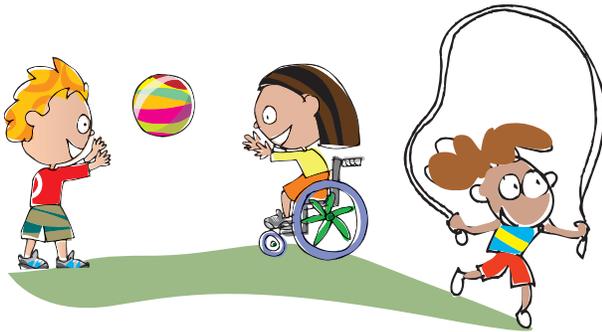
Activities

What are some specific ways I can encourage active play every day in my child care program?

Use every opportunity to show the children that you believe physical activity is important.

Which of these ideas will you try next week? Mark your choices.

- Encourage active play by offering children a variety of options** such as hula hoops, balls, and jump ropes and letting them choose what they want to do.



- Make a chart for tracking physical activity with children’s and child care providers’ names.** Have children place a sticker or a stamp by their name every time they participate in active play. Send ideas home to families so they can continue to encourage active play at home.

- Let families know that physical activity is an important part of the day** when children are in your care. Add physical activity messages to newsletters, posters, and posted schedules. http://www.teamnutrition.usda.gov/resources/Nibbles/Nibbles_Newsletter_36.pdf

- Display posters and pictures of children and adults being physically active.** Read books that promote physical activity as part of the story.

- Request that families dress children in clothing, shoes, and outerwear** that allow movement and play outside, or bring clothes to change into for playing outdoors.

- Make activity cards and use them for a game** by having children select a card and then demonstrate the activity. Activity cards are easy to make – use index cards or square sheets of paper. On one side of the card, paste a picture of a physical activity movement. The child who chooses the card will show everyone else how to do the movement.

- See the *Provide Opportunities for Active Play* tip sheet** on page 63 for instructions and other ideas.

List other deas to show childern that physical activity is fun:

- Include physical activity in your special events and family events.** Lead children and their families in playing *Octopus Tag* or *Musical Hoops*. Add fun by using pool noodles, beach balls, and hula hoops.

- Be a good role model.** Participate with children in activities and show them through your actions that active play is an important and fun part of the day. Make positive comments about physical activity.



Promote Active Play Through Written Policies and Practices



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A written policy is a statement you write about the importance you give to something in your child care program. You can use such a statement in your program handbook, descriptions, or advertisements, and in the materials you give to parents to tell how important active play (physical activity) and movement are, and how these will be a big part of the day the children spend with you.



Why are written policies that promote physical activity important?

- ▶ **Policy statements can help child care providers and families** understand why daily physical activity is so important for children's health, development, and weight.
- ▶ **Policies describing outdoor physical activity can encourage outdoor play** in most weather conditions. This can help families understand the need to make sure their children are dressed appropriately for the weather each day.
- ▶ **When new staff start working at the child care program,** written policies will help them learn about responsibilities and expectations at the program.

What types of physical activity policies and practices should I have?

The best child care programs have written policies that include the benefits of physical activity and ways for children to participate in fun active play. When writing or revising policies, include the:

- ▶ **Benefits:** The benefits of physical activity and outdoor play should be listed. (See the *Let's Move! Child Care* Web site for more information <http://healthykidshealthyfuture.org/content/hkhf/home/activities.html>.)
- ▶ **Duration:** Children should spend 60 to 120 minutes each day outdoors depending on their age and weather conditions. Policies should promote movement over the course of the day through two or more structured activities or games that are led by a caregiver. Policies should also describe what will be done to ensure active play on days with more extreme weather (examples: very hot, very cold, or thunderstorms).
- ▶ **Water availability:** Make sure drinking water is freely available, both indoors and outdoors, throughout the day. (See the *Make Water Available* tip sheet on page 51 for more information.)
- ▶ **Setting:** Covered areas for shade and shelter should be available outdoors.
- ▶ **Clothing and Footwear:** Clothing should permit easy movement that enables children to participate fully in active play. Footwear should provide support for running and climbing.

more 'policies' tips on next page ...



... more 'policies' tips

- ▶ **Sunscreen:** Children should be protected from the sun by using shade, sun-protective clothing, and “broad-spectrum” sunscreen with UVB-ray and UVA-ray protection of SPF 15 or higher, with permission from parents or guardians.
- ▶ **Safety procedures:** Activity areas should be clear of sharp objects, trash, or other objects that could cause injury. Proper safety equipment should be used for the age of the children, for example, soft balls and bats should be used instead of hard balls and bats with younger children.

What is an example of a written policy on physical activity?

There are many tools to help you write a physical activity policy for your child care program and communicate its importance to staff and families. One way to begin is with an assessment of the child care center or home. See “Additional Resources” on page 97, or visit the *Let’s Move Child Care* Web site, <http://healthykidshealthyfuture.org/welcome.html>. Here is an example of a policy for outdoor play and appropriate clothing and footwear for active play:

Children attending ABC Child Care shall play outdoors daily when weather and air quality conditions do not pose a significant health risk. Time planned for outdoor play and physical activity depends on the age group and weather conditions. Activities shall include structured play (led by the adult caregiver) and free play (not led by an adult).

- **Toddlers (12 months to 3 years old)** shall participate in 60 to 90 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity. **Preschoolers (3 to 6 years old)** shall participate in 90 to 120 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity.
- **Children shall be dressed appropriately for the weather**, including wearing appropriate seasonal clothing and footwear, so they can participate fully, move freely, and play safely.
- **Child care providers will inform parents, caregivers, and families** that children need to be dressed appropriately for the current weather conditions to play outdoors.

Children should wear clothing appropriate for the current weather:

- **Snow:** heavy coat, waterproof boots, hat, and mittens.
- **Rain:** raincoat and waterproof boots.
- **Different temperatures during the day:** layers of clothing.

Footwear should provide support for running and climbing. Examples of **appropriate** footwear include sneakers, gym shoes, and other shoes with rubber soles that enclose the feet and will not come off easily. **Examples of inappropriate clothing and footwear include:**

- **Footwear that can come off while running**, or that does not provide support for climbing (examples: flip-flops, beach sandals, and clogs).
- **Clothing that can catch on playground equipment** (examples: clothes with drawstrings or loops).
- **Clothing that does not protect children** from the current weather conditions.

Activities

How can I implement policies and practices that promote physical activity?

Think about how you communicate with staff and families to make sure everyone understands and implements the policies and expectations. If possible, include written policy statements on physical activity in child care program or staff policy handbooks. Share these policies with families through a newsletter or take-home flyer. Here are some these ideas to ensure that these policies are understood and implemented.

How can you make everyone aware of the policies? Mark your choices.

- Post the written policies** in a location where everyone can read and be aware of them.
- When new families are registering their children in your child care program**, talk about the existing physical activity policies so they know what to expect. Encourage families to support active play at home.
- Other ideas:** _____

How can you encourage participation in training or education sessions? Mark your choices.

- Provide mini-education programs to parents** so they understand the reasons for the policies for physical activity and outdoor play. Use examples of existing physical activity best practices, such as those items listed in the 'Healthy Checklist' on the *Let's Move! Child Care* Web site. <http://healthykidshealthyfuture.org/welcome.html>
- Have staff participate in training sessions on physical activity at least twice a year.** Staff training should be provided by a qualified child care trainer with expertise in physical activity for young children.
- Other ideas:** _____

How can you implement these policies every day? Mark your choices.

- Encourage all children to try new activities and celebrate with children when they participate at any skill level.** Focus on self-challenge, and find a new goal for each child according to his or her skill level. For example, say, "You did three hops on one foot. Now can you do four?"
- Schedule active play before mealtimes.** This way, kids will feel hungry for their meal and will behave better, making for a more pleasant mealtime experience for everyone.
- Other ideas:** _____



My Notes:



Limit Screen Time



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Young children who spend a lot of time watching TV or playing video and computer games are less likely to be physically active in later childhood.

They are also likely to eat foods that are less healthy, such as soft drinks and fried foods as well as more snacks, and may be more likely to become overweight. In many child care settings, children spend 1 to 3 hours watching TV each day.



How much total screen time* should children be allowed every day, both at child care and at home?

- ▶ **No screen time (TV/video/DVD)** for children under the age of 2.
- ▶ **No more than 1 to 2 hours per day** of high-quality programming for children over the age of 2.

* Screen time includes TV and DVD viewing, video games, recreational computer use, and other electronic devices.

How much screen time should children be allowed while in child care?

Children under the age of 2	No screen time, including TV/video/DVD viewing or computer use.
Children over 2 years old	Only 30 minutes total of screen time per week.
	No more than 15-minute increments of computer use.
All Ages	No screen time during meals or snack time.

Special Notes:

- Parents and families should be informed if screen media are used in child care programs.
- Screen time should only be for educational or physical activity programs.
- All screen time should not have any commercials or advertising.



Why do we need to limit screen time use?

Screen time can take away from activities that help brain development and social skills, such as talking, playing, singing, and reading.

▶ It is important to limit TV and DVD time because:

- Having the TV on can disturb children's sleep and play, even if it is on in the background.
- TV and some DVDs include advertisements for unhealthy foods. Young children cannot tell the difference between programs and advertisements.

▶ It is important to limit video game* playing because:

- The more time children spend playing video games, the more likely they are to have difficulty concentrating in school.
- Many video games contain violence.
- We know from research that, at least for boys, the more time they spend playing video games and watching TV, the less active they are.
- Even video games requiring children to be active while playing the game (called exergames) should be limited. Children might not reach a high level of physical activity when playing these games.

* Video games include those played using a video game console and a TV, a hand-held device such as a cell phone, or a computer.



▶ It is important to limit recreational computer use, even for educational games, because:

- Many Web sites promote less healthy foods.
- Many Web sites include on-screen computer or video games.
- Computer games can impair children's sleep at night, possibly causing them to spend less time in deep sleep. Sleep is important for children's health and development.

----- Activities -----

How can I put this information into practice in my child care program?

Replace screen time with creative activities children can do on their own while you are accomplishing other tasks.

Which of these fun ideas will you try next week? Mark your choices.

- Play music:** Have children make up their own dances. Add wide ribbons and beach balls for more movement.
- Provide toys for children to stack:** For infants and toddlers, provide nesting cups or building blocks.
- Organize puzzle time:** Have easy puzzles children can do alone or in pairs.
- Draw, color, create a sculpture, or use play dough:** Choose a topic of the day and have children draw or create the first thing that comes to mind when they hear the topic. Do easy craft projects, such as coloring or making greeting cards for upcoming holidays or birthdays.
- Other ideas:** _____

Practice good role modeling. Participate in activities with them. Limit cell phone and computer use when children are busy with other activities.

Which of these creative activity ideas will you try with children next week? Mark your choices.

- Conduct a “pretend play” activity:** Cut out shapes in a variety of colors. Have children make a pretend place that each shape represents. Travel from place to place by putting the shapes in various spots both indoors and outdoors.
- Read:** Read books and point to pictures. Have children make up their own stories.
- Encourage extra outdoor play:** Set up a safe obstacle course for children to balance, climb, jump, and hop. Visit www.headstartbodystart.org for additional ideas for outdoor play and active play using pool noodles, beach balls, and hula hoops.
- Act out stories or skits:** Hand out a variety of costume pieces. Have children dress up and act out a play or story.
- Involve children in part of the meal and snack preparation,** as well as clean-up time.
- Encourage children to be active:** Do not allow hand-held video games during active play times.
- See the *Active Play* tip sheets** on pages 63 and 67 for more ideas.
- Other ideas:** _____





My Notes: