



# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

*Making the case for kids moving more*

# Articles

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## Peaceful Playgrounds

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# Physical activity : Making the case for kids moving more.

## What is Physical Activity?



Kids enjoying physical activity.

Physical activity is any bodily exercise that enhances or maintains physical fitness and overall health or wellness. We think of physical activity as burning

energy or calories. For health benefits, physical activity should be of moderate or vigorous intensity, according to the USDA.

Some examples of moderate activities include: walking, biking, gardening, and hiking.

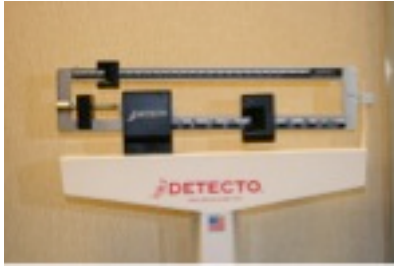
Some examples of vigorous activities include: running, swimming, aerobic exercise, soccer and competitive basketball.

## How Active is Active Enough?

Typically once you begin to sweat you are engaged in moderate to vigorous physical activity. If you are running and find it difficult to talk-and-run, chances are you are engaged in moderate to vigorous activity. It is generally thought that children begin to see health benefits after 20-30 minutes of continuous moderate to vigorous activity per day occurring for a period of 6 weeks and beyond.

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education recommends that children participate in 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity five days a week. However, the Shape of the Nation Report 2010 reveals that fewer than one-third of all children ages six to 17 engage in vigorous activity defined as participating in physical activity for at least 20 minutes that made the child sweat and breathe hard for at least 20 minutes.

## **Health Benefits of Physical Activity**



Physical activity helps with weight management.

Regular physical activity is important for children for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the long term health benefits. Physical activity also aids in maintaining a healthy weight.

In addition to long term health benefits, children also benefit from keeping active.

### **Some of the additional benefits are:**

- Decreases chance depression
- Helps with sleeping at night
- Strengthens bones and muscles
- Helps with maintaining a healthy weight
- Enjoying the ability to move easily.

### **Inactive children and young adults can show signs of:**

- Heart disease
- Type 2 diabetes
- High blood pressure, and
- Increased chance of stroke
- The good news is that even a modest amount of physical activity is good for children's health and the more active you are the more you will benefit.

## **How Children Become More Active**

There are many popular activities that help children to get and remain active. Sports participation comes to mind as well as dance and gymnastics classes.

Schools that enjoy the benefit of a physical education instructor are at an advantage as physical activity minutes are often met or can occur in their daily physical education class. An additional benefit is instruction that they receive often results in underlying [motor skill proficiency](#) contributing to their success. They tend to increase their participation in sports teams; they gain the confidence to be active.

It is important to encourage young people to participate in physical activities that are appropriate for their age, that are enjoyable, and that offer variety.



Peaceful Playgrounds gets kids moving.

[Recess](#) is another opportunity for physical activity at school. Typically children have been shown to be more active at recess than in [physical education](#). However this depends largely on the quality of physical education instruction that they receive.

Peer and sibling support, access to play spaces and [equipment](#), as well as time spent outdoors also contribute to physical activity.

Generally speaking one of the best indicators of an active child is an active and supportive parent (although this does not hold true for all subgroups). When parents spend time in physical activity with children they not only gain skills and proficiency but generally acquire an understanding of the relationship between physical activity, good health and wellbeing.

## **The Outdoor Environment**

Access to facilities, programs and the outdoors is positively associated with children's physical activity. Likewise, community sports participation and previous physical activity participation were found to correlate with active children and adolescents. Sedentary behavior was inversely related to physical activity.

Regular [physical activity in children](#) and adolescents promotes a healthy body weight and body composition.

### **Link between [Physical Activity and Academics](#)**



Physical activity enhances academic performance

An emerging body of research is pointing to the relationship between physical activity and academics. Good habits are the key to good health and healthy students perform better academically, have better attendance and behave better in class according the American Heart Association.

Three recent literature reviews conclude that school-based physical activity programs may result in short-term cognitive benefits (Taras, 2005), improve cognitive functioning among children (Sibley & Etnier, 2003), and do not hinder academic achievement (Trudeau & Shepard, 2008). A physical activity break such as recess has been shown to reduce fidgeting, increase a child's ability to focus and combat depression and anxiety.

2010 Shape of the Nation Report. National Association for Sport and Physical

Sallis, J.F., J.J. Prochaska, and W.C. Taylor. A review of correlates of physical activity of children and adolescents. *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*. 2000 by the American College of Sports Medicine.

American Heart Association. For the Classroom. Teacher Section. Elementary School Lesson Plans.  
[www.heart.org/educator/forthe classroom/](http://www.heart.org/educator/forthe classroom/)