

Activities for younger children

Babies and children are instinctively active, and daily movement helps to develop their senses and ability to move. Encourage activity and you'll help establish the healthy habit of regular physical activity.

When choosing physical activities for babies, toddlers and young children, focus on activities that are fun. All of the activities your child enjoys will increase her ability to move with confidence and competence, so there's no need to apply pressure about perfect technique or winning and losing.

It's normal for young children to make up rules and change them to suit themselves. Although they find rules very interesting, children can't really follow them until they are older. Experimenting with the rules is a good thing, in that it helps to build their confidence: kids need lots of practice at doing well before they can cope with losing. Most children start to be ready for organised sport somewhere between eight and 10 years old. Before that, it can be a bit stressful, and can lead to them feeling disappointed in themselves. This can cause them to lose confidence and stop participating in physical activities.

Activities for children 0-2 years

Babies (0-12 months) need plenty of opportunities for unrestricted movement. Choose or create a safe environment that encourages exploring and the development of skills such as reaching, rolling, sitting up, crawling, pulling up, cruising and walking.

Even tiny babies like to stretch and play. A large blanket on the floor (or on the grass, if you're outside) can be a safe, clean and welcoming place for your baby to practise lifting her head or develop strong muscles during 'tummy time'. It's also the perfect place to learn to roll, creep, crawl and sit. If you put a toy just out of reach, you'll encourage your baby make an extra effort that will help her physical development.

Before putting baby on the floor, take a look for potential hazards down at baby level. Stay with your baby at all times to keep things safe.

Playing lots of games is also rewarding. Even only slightly physical games, like pat-a-cake and peek-a-boo, can do a lot to help your baby's learning and movement skills. And taking your baby to new places will stimulate her curiosity.

Once your child is walking, there'll be no stopping for breath. You can support her new physical mastery by allowing her to be active rather than keeping her confined to a stroller. Provide toys and activities that encourage movement. Playing with her and giving praise as she learns to run, hop, dance and throw will provide vital encouragement. When you help her climb a slide at the local playground, you are building self-confidence and balance, and paving the way for her to climb stairs.

Activities for children 2-5 years

Toddlers and preschoolers need plenty of time to just run around and play – adventure playgrounds, parks and the beach are all great places for kids this age.

Here are some ways to keep physical activity fun:

- Use a large, soft ball to start teaching the basics of throwing, catching and kicking a ball.
- Chase bubbles.
- Play different kinds of music to encourage creative dancing and a sense of rhythm.
- Invent some silly walks and runs with your child, such as running like a monkey, hopping like a bunny and flapping like a bird.
- Encourage the riding of scooters and tricycles, and play with push toys such as trucks, doll strollers and toy lawn mowers.
- Play games that involve rolling, skipping, hopping and chasing.
- Put the stroller away and walk to the library, park or shops.