

## **Encouraging kids to be active**

Kids will jump at the chance to be active, especially if they know they'll have fun. They'll learn to love staying fit if you find activities that they enjoy and give them plenty of variety.

Try lots of different activities to find something your child enjoys and is good at. Children who are good at balancing may also like dance or gymnastics, for instance, while others with good hand-to-eye coordination might have a talent for cricket or tennis.

Helping kids find activities that they like is one of the keys to keeping them active. Dancing, skipping, running, playing ball, horse riding, flying a kite – it doesn't matter what the activity is, as long as they like it.

Keep variety in their activities with a mix of sports, and a mix of moderate and vigorous activities. Moderate activities include things like bike riding, climbing and other active play. Vigorous activities that get your child's heart pumping are things like swimming, running and dancing; and team sports like netball, soccer and football.

By trying out different activities your child will pick up new skills, stay interested and challenged and get enough exercise.

### **Tips for encouraging active kids**

- Be active yourself and your child will follow your lead.
- Offer positive feedback and support to encourage your child when an activity is proving a little difficult.
- Spend active time with your child. Instead of being a couch potato or focusing too much on jobs that need to be done around the house, make some time to have fun playing frisbee, walking and cycling with your child.
- Encourage them to play outside and praise them when they do.
- Encourage them to take up an organised sport or group lessons in swimming or dancing.
- Get the family going: organise family activities such as camping, bushwalking and outdoor games.
- Involve your child in daily chores around the house, such as gardening, washing the car and cleaning. Not only do these activities keep everyone physically active, they help the house run smoothly.
- Keep an activities box at home and in the car with balls, frisbee, kite, beach bucket and spade so that you're always prepared.
- Balls, bikes and scooters make great gifts, and promote physical activity and opportunities to play outdoors.
- Limit TV time. Keep an eye on the amount of time your child spends watching TV or using the computer. Aim for no more than two hours a day and preferably less than 30 minutes a day.

Kids are often really active only in bursts of a few minutes or less, even during low-intensity active play. Young children are rarely vigorously active for long periods, but will often have bursts of activity for a few minutes or less. This is healthy, and should be encouraged.

## **Walking**

There's no need to run a marathon. One of the easiest ways to incorporate activity into your child's routine is to take regular walks together. You can walk to school, child care or kinder (look for parks along the way).

You can even start when your child is a baby. Young babies can go on outings in a sling, carrier or pram. As they become toddlers, encourage them to walk some of the way. Use your child's age to tailor the route and the length of time spent walking – allow around 1 km per birthday. That is, a three-year-old can walk up to 3 km, with rest breaks.

Walking to school every day has many benefits for children, parents and communities, including:

- improved fitness of parents and children
- maintenance of a healthy weight
- the opportunity to learn and practice road rules and road safety
- increased awareness of surroundings and involvement in the neighbourhood
- improved observation skills – when children who walk to school draw pictures of their journey they tend to draw people and things from the environment; kids who are driven to school draw cars
- the chance for children and parents to talk and spend time together
- social opportunities, such as meeting neighbours along the route and chatting with other parents at the school gate.

You can expand the range of the walks by following nature trails in parks and by taking trips to interesting locations. If your child is really resistant to walking, you could even think about getting a pet dog for an incentive.