

How much physical activity do children need

This may sound like a lot, but don't worry! Your child may already be meeting the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. And, you'll soon discover all the easy and enjoyable ways to help your child meet the recommendations. Encourage your child to participate in activities that are age-appropriate, enjoyable and offer variety! Just make sure your child or adolescent is doing three types of physical activity:

1. Aerobic Activity

Aerobic activity should make up most of your child's 60 or more minutes of physical activity each day. This can include either moderate-intensity aerobic activity, such as brisk walking, or vigorous-intensity activity, such as running. Be sure to include vigorous-intensity aerobic activity on at least 3 days per week.

2. Muscle Strengthening

Include muscle strengthening activities, such as gymnastics or push-ups, at least 3 days per week as part of your child's 60 or more minutes.

3. Bone Strengthening

Include bone strengthening activities, such as jumping rope or running, at least 3 days per week as part of your child's 60 or more minutes.

How do I know if my child's aerobic activity is moderate- or vigorous-intensity?

Here are two ways to think about moderate- and vigorous-intensity:

1. As a rule of thumb, on a scale of 0 to 10, where sitting is a 0 and the highest level of activity is a 10, moderate-intensity activity is a 5 or 6. When your child does moderate-intensity activity, the heart will beat faster than normal and the child will breathe harder than normal. Vigorous-intensity activity is a level 7 or 8. When your child does vigorous-intensity activity, their heart will beat much faster than normal and they will breathe much harder than normal.
2. Another way to judge intensity is to think about the activity your child is doing and compare it to the average child. What amount of intensity would the average child use? For example, when your daughter walks to school with friends each morning, she's probably doing moderate-intensity aerobic activity. But while she is at school, when she runs, or chases others by playing tag during recess, she's probably doing vigorous-intensity activity.

What do you mean by "age-appropriate" activities?

Some physical activity is better-suited for children than adolescents. For example, children do not usually need formal muscle-strengthening programs, such as lifting weights. Younger children usually strengthen their muscles when they do gymnastics, play on a jungle gym or climb trees. As children grow older and become adolescents, they may start structured weight programs. For example, they may do these types of programs along with their football or basketball team practice.