

The Importance of Exercise

Exercise is good for growing children as well as for adults. It keeps muscles stronger, increases flexibility and makes them feel better, as well as making it easier to maintain a healthy weight.

Benefits of exercise

Apart from these important health benefits, exercise also:

- helps children to develop social skills such as sharing, taking turns, cooperating and learning about winning and losing
- helps children to develop physical skills such as running, eye-hand coordination and ball skills
- helps children to get a sense of belonging as they do things with other children, either in casual or organised activities and sports
- helps families when parents exercise with their children or when parents support their child's sport.

Exercise is also a good stress reliever. If a child is having difficulty sleeping, concentrating or with friendships, exercise can relieve some of the stress. Increasing overweight and obesity is happening world wide. People who are overweight or obese are more likely to have health problems. Helping young children to develop good eating patterns and enjoyment from sport and exercise may help them avoid later health problems.

How much physical activity?

- Children (and adults) should be active every day in as many ways as they can.
- Each day school-aged children and teenagers should accumulate **at least 60 minutes** of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity to ensure healthy development.
- School aged children can also benefit from organised sports or activities such as dance or ball sports, according to their interests, for three or more sessions of twenty minutes or more per week. However most primary school aged children are much more active than this. In high school, it is more important to encourage them to stay active.
- It is important that children are enjoying the activity and that it is not more demanding or competitive than they feel comfortable with.
- If exercise is starting to take over a child's life it is possible that the child is overexercising. It may also be possible that the child is fearful of the coach or other team members, or something else is wrong. If this is happening with your child talk with him or her about it, and perhaps check it out with other parents.

- Adults are advised to exercise for at least 30 minutes, three or more times a week. Exercise several more times a week is probably even more valuable if it is enjoyable and if it is not causing pain or distress.