

Exercise and Your Lifestyle

Make exercise a part of your lifestyle. Your goal should be some type of exercise every day, or at the very least, 3 to 4 times a week. Try to do some kind of aerobic activity that requires continuous physical activity (elevates your heart rate) without stopping for at least 20 to 30 minutes each time. Do the activity as often as possible, but do not exercise to the point of pain because this can lead to injury.

Like all things, exercise can be overdone. Signs you may be overdoing it include:

- Weight that falls below what is normal for your age, height, and build
- It starts to interfere with your normal activities
- Muscles that become so sore that you risk injuring yourself

If you notice any of these signs, talk with your pediatrician before health problems occur.

Besides the physical and mental health benefits, regular physical activity can also help increase self-confidence, offer the opportunity to learn new skills and meet people with similar interests. To make more time for exercise, limit the amount of time you and your family watch television or play computer or video games. Whenever possible, eat 3 healthy meals a day, including at least 2 to 4 servings of fruit and 3 to 5 servings of vegetables each day. Limit your intake of fat, cholesterol, salt, and sugar. For even better health, don't smoke, drink alcohol, or do other drugs.

Exercise should also be a routine part of your family's day, just like eating, and sleeping. It may help to plan a physical activity as a family. Most people find that it is more fun to exercise with someone else. More importantly, though, is that everyone *likes* the exercise or activity. Everyone is more apt to stay in the habit of doing whatever activity they choose if it is one that they enjoy.

Try to pick a "life sport" that you or your family enjoy. Unlike a competitive team sport like football or baseball, a life sport is any kind of physical exercise or activity that you can do throughout your life. Examples of life sports are:

- Swimming
- Golf
- Bicycling
- Jogging
- Tennis
- Walking
- Skating

Regular exercise should include aerobic activity. Aerobic activity is continuous and it makes you breathe harder and increases your heart rate. This type of exercise increases your fitness level and makes your heart and lungs work more efficiently. It also helps to maintain a normal weight by burning off excess fat. Examples of aerobic activities are brisk walking, basketball, bicycling, swimming, in-line or ice skating, soccer, jogging, and taking an aerobics or step class. Baseball and football do not involve as much continuous exercise because you are not active the whole time. In general, the more aerobic an activity, the more calories – and eventually fat – will be burned.

Any type of regular, physical activity is good for your body. Household chores, such as mowing the lawn, vacuuming, or scrubbing, involve exercise and may have fitness benefits, depending on how vigorously you do the chores. Just about any physical activity will improve fitness. For example, walking is better than riding in a car, and using the stairs is better than taking an elevator. Making small changes like these in your everyday life can make you and your family more physically fit. The most important thing is to keep moving.

Be sure to include stretching exercises in your daily routine. Before doing any physical activity, stretch out your muscles. This warms them up and helps protect against injury. Stretching makes your muscles and joints more flexible, too. It is also important to stretch out *after* you exercise to cool down your muscles.