



Ideas for Exercise with Your Young Child



Floor Based exercises – age 0 months–6 months

- Tummy time – aim to work up to more than 30 minutes per day.
- Peek-a-boo
- Play Mat – place baby on mat with toys suspended above to promote reaching and kicking behaviors
- Balance Activities – starting at age at 3-4 months, help babies sit and stand supported until they are tired
- Moving to music – encourage your baby to move to music by singing or playing songs

Exercises for age 6–12 Months

- Reaching – place toys just out of reach for baby to grasp
- Making sounds – give baby wooden spoons to bang on pots and pans, high chair tray, or plastic containers
- Play ball – sit supported and roll a ball back and forth
- Pulling to stand
- Push and pull toys
- Make tunnels out of chairs or cardboard boxes for baby to enjoy crawling through

Exercises for age 1–5 years

- Family walks (dress for the season and enjoy walks year-round!)
- Play “cleanup”
- Run around the park
- Throw or kick a ball
- Go to the playground
- Pretend to be animals
- Have a dance party
- Play bubbles
- Make an obstacle course
- Yoga for kids

How Much Physical Activity Do Young Children Need?

As much as possible! The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends for infants to be active several times a day through floor-based exercises.¹ Providing a physically stimulating environment for babies helps them roll, crawl, and walk sooner than those in a more sedentary environment.²

Children ages 1–4 years old should spend at least 60 minutes and up to several hours of unstructured activity daily with free play.³ Between ages 1–4, children are learning to master basic motor skills such as walking, marching, galloping, hopping, running, traveling around obstacles, and skipping. As strength and flexibility increase, these tasks will be mastered with practice.

Children ages 5 and up should be active as much as possible during the day getting at least 60 minutes of moderate or vigorous physical activity each day. Engaging young children in structured and unstructured play promotes joy of movement, a sense of control, and the ability to navigate the body through space.^{4,5}

Daily physical activity is an essential component of a healthy lifestyle. Encouraging young children to move their bodies is fun and has long term benefits including :

- increased lean body mass
- increased muscle and bone strength
- brain growth and development
- better quality sleep
- improvements in behavior, attention, and mood
- increased physical literacy

Promoting Physical Activity In Young Children

Physical Skills By Age

Help your child master these skills to ensure they are increasing their physical literacy as they grow!

Age	Skill	How To Develop
3-4 months	Grasping	Offer toys for hand/eye coordination
4-6 months	Rolling	Tummy time to build core strength
6 months	Sitting	Tummy time to build core strength
7-10 months	Crawling	Place toys to build strength/balance
9 months	Cruising	Safe environment to pull to stand
12 months	Walking	Safe environment to explore
1-4 years	Swimming	Supervised swim lessons
2 years	Running/Kicking	Play chase/soccer with a foam ball
2+ years	Catching	Make a basket with your arms
4 years	Skating	Provide equipment and a safe place



Tips for Movement Activities

- Give your baby breaks when you can tell they are getting tired
- Short sessions multiple times a day work well until infant or child is strong enough to play for longer periods of time
- Long periods of time in walkers, jumpers, or infant seats can delay motor development
- Until age 18-24 months NO amount of screen time is appropriate, including phone or tablet (the exception is when video chatting with friends and family). Too much screen time decreases the amount of time children spend staying active.
- Model being physically active for your child. They will learn by your example!

References:

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2. Bright Futures Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children, and Adolescents. https://brightfutures.aap.org/Bright%20Futures%20Documents/BF4_PhysicalActivity.pdf
3. <https://www.shapeamerica.org/standards/guidelines/activestart.aspx>
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5. Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children, Michael Yogman, Andrew Garner, Jeffrey Hutchinson, Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, COMMITTEE ON PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF CHILD AND FAMILY HEALTH and COUNCIL ON COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA, Pediatrics September 2018, 142 (3) e20182058

