

# Suggested Reading

*Fit Kids: A Practical Guide to Raising Healthy and Active Children from Birth to Teens*

Mary Gavin, MD, Steven Dowson, MD & Neil Izenberg, MD; Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada; 2004.

*Active Start for Healthy Kids: Activities, Exercises, and Nutritional Tips*

Stephen J. Virgilio; Human Kinetics; 2006

*365 Activities for Fitness, Food and Fun for the Whole Family*, Sweet, Julia; 2001

# Suggested Web Links

For further web links on this topic, please visit [www.halton.ca/childhealthlinks](http://www.halton.ca/childhealthlinks).



For more information, contact  
Children's Health Information Line

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# Let Me Move... Watch Me Grow

(Ages 1-5 years)



Early childhood is the ideal time to lay the foundation for toddlers and preschoolers to be physically active. This is a time when children learn basic motor skills such as running, jumping and climbing. Young children love to move and need many opportunities to be physically active.

## Key Principles to an Active Start

Toddlers and preschoolers should be active every day, indoors and outdoors, in both structured and unstructured activities.

**Structured** physical activity includes games and activities that you direct or do with the children. Structured play helps children learn skills such as how to work with others and how to follow instructions. Toddlers should accumulate at least 30 minutes of structured physical activity every day. Once they become a preschooler, they should get at least 60 minutes of daily structured physical activity.

**Unstructured** physical activity is supervised free time for children to play on their own or with other children. In unstructured play, children learn to use their imagination, creativity and problem-solving abilities. Toddlers and preschoolers should get at least 60 minutes of unstructured physical activity every day. Your child should not be inactive for more than an hour at a time, except while sleeping.

Physical activity requirements can be reached by adding up several short periods throughout the day.

Encourage your child to move in all kinds of ways. Those movements are the building blocks to allow him or her to develop more complex movements.

Play is the primary form of physical activity for children up to school age. Toddlers and preschoolers are **naturally** active, so encourage this as much as possible.

# Benefits of Physical Activity

- Is an important component of early brain development and learning
- Improves self-esteem
- Makes the heart, lungs, muscles and bones stronger
- Helps develop physical coordination, flexibility and balance
- Helps improve sleeping and eating habits



## Development of Key Motor Skills

Over the years, toddlers and preschoolers master basic skills as they gain muscle control, balance, and coordination. Each new skill mastered allows a toddler or preschooler to progress to the next one. Motor skills such as running, jumping, kicking, throwing and catching are the building blocks for more complex movements.

<b>Early Toddler Skills (12-24 months)</b>	Walks independently, pulls toys while walking, stoops and gets back up, begins to run, kicks a ball
<b>Older Toddler Skills (24-36 Months)</b>	Balances one to two seconds on one foot, alternates feet up and down stairs, climbs well, throws ball overhand, runs and jumps well
<b>Preschooler (3 to 4 yrs)</b>	Hops and stands on one foot up to five seconds, walks up and down stairs with more skill (may use handrail for support), throws ball overhand, catches bounced ball, moves forward and backward with agility
<b>Kindergarten (4 to 5 yrs)</b>	Stands on one foot for 10 seconds or longer, throws and catches a ball, hops, somersaults, swings, skips, tosses beanbags into holes



# Frequently Asked Questions

## I have a 2 yr old and a 4 yr old. What are some examples of structured activities we can do together?

There are many activities you can do with both children. The key is making it fun! Try playing music and doing different movements – march, hop, wiggle or dance. You can play follow the leader games where you perform different movements and the children imitate you. Children at this age love stop-and-go walking and running games (e.g. tag or red light, green light).

## How can I encourage my preschooler to be physically active?

As a parent or caregiver, you can encourage your child to be active by being **active yourself** and providing **adequate time** for physical activity. It is important to provide your preschooler with a physically interesting environment, both indoors and outdoors, that is safe for them to explore. Young children develop at different ages and stages, so choose activities that are appropriate for their skill level. When introducing a new activity, do so in a relaxed and reassuring way. Praise children for participating in an activity in order to build their confidence. Activities should be fun for the child. Finally, be active as a family - hiking, biking, and going to the park are great ways to be active together.

## Should I enrol my 3 or 4-year-old in an organized sport program?

When looking for programs in which to enrol your preschooler, look for programs that stress developing the basic motor skills, such as swimming, not ones that focus on sport or competition. Usually preschoolers haven't had enough practice or experience to develop the necessary skills to participate in a competitive sport. Once a child has developed agility, coordination and strength, he or she will be better prepared for organized sport.

