

Provide Opportunities for Active Play Every Day



Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children: Provider Handbook for the Child and Adult Care Food Program

Active play and movement are important for every child's growth, health, development, and learning.

Although they may seem to be active and energetic, most children do not get the amount of physical activity they need. Research shows that young children in child care still spend a lot of their time sitting or lying down. Children should not be seated or still for more than 15 minutes at a time, except during meals or naps.

Children need a healthy balance of high-energy active play like running and climbing, as well as passive play like sitting in the sand box. Children spend many hours each day in your care, so providing the recommended amount of active play is important in helping children establish healthy habits.



How much time should be planned for active play every day?

Every child care program should promote children's active play every day. Time planned for outdoor play and physical activity depends on the age group and weather conditions. Vary activities between **structured play** (led by the adult caregiver) and **free play** (not led by an adult), and provide time for moderate to vigorous activities.

- ▶ **Toddlers (12 months to 3 years old):** Provide 60 to 90 minutes per 8-hour day for moderate to vigorous physical activity.
- ▶ **Preschoolers (3 to 6 years old):** Provide 90 to 120 minutes per 8-hour day for moderate to vigorous physical activity.



Moderate and **vigorous** physical activity will make children breathe harder and make their hearts beat faster than when they are not active.

Moderate Physical Activity

- Walking
- Playing on outdoor play equipment, moving about, swinging, climbing, or tumbling
- Playing hopscotch, 4-square, kickball, or ball games

Vigorous Physical Activity

- Running, hopping, galloping, or walking quickly up a hill
- Playing, running, or jumping games
- Doing jumping jacks
- Dancing or skipping to music

Active play time does not have to occur in a single session. Short bursts of activity work well for young children.

You can even plan these activities throughout the course of the day in 10- to 20-minute intervals. For example: 30 minutes of free play on the playground in the morning, 15 minutes of dancing after naptime, 10 minutes of tumbling, 20-minute nature discovery walk after lunch, 15 minutes of climbing on playground equipment, and 20 minutes of Wiggle Rope (jumping over a wiggling jump rope "snake" close to the ground.)



What types of active play opportunities should I offer?

Children can enjoy skipping, climbing, dancing, and jumping. Daily active play, along with a healthy diet, is important for growing at a healthy weight. Active play helps children develop a variety of large muscle skills. All children should participate in:

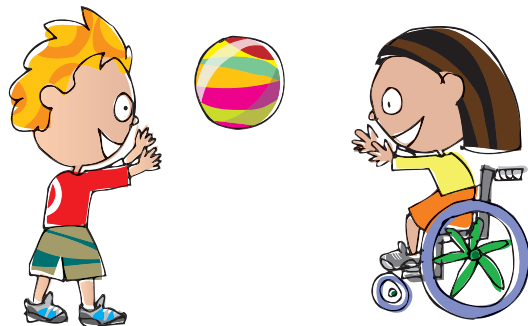
- ▶ **Outdoor play two to three times each day**, depending on the weather.
- ▶ **Noncompetitive activities and games led by adults** that encourage movement two or more times during the day.
- ▶ **Noncompetitive activities that help children develop and practice movement skills** that involve large muscle groups and whole body movement.



How can I help children be physically active every day?

- ▶ **Be a good role model.** Participate with children in activities and show them that you enjoy active play every day.
- ▶ **Be weather-ready.** When weather is too severe for outdoor play, dance to music indoors and tell or read stories that children act out physically.
- ▶ **Create opportunities for safe active play indoors and outdoors.** Use toys and equipment that are the right size for the age of the children. This might include bean bags, push toys, building blocks, and tricycles. Children may be playing with certain toys for the first time. Show children how to play with these toys safely.
- ▶ **Use space wisely.** Many games and activities meant for outdoors and large spaces can be changed for use in limited, indoor spaces. For example, use colored masking tape to create pathways for children to follow as they jump or walk.
- ▶ **Keep children moving.** Encourage all children to participate by playing games that do not have them sitting still for a long period of time or “out” of the game early.
- ▶ **Help everyone be active.** Plan activities that allow all children the opportunity to play, including those with special needs.
- ▶ **Include movement and physical action in children's indoor play and learning activities.**

Note: Strollers, high chairs, harnesses, and leashes limit children’s ability to move. Toddlers and young children need physical activity for development of muscles and movement skills, so moving around and exploring their environment without physical restraints are critical.



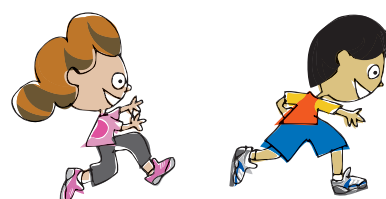
----- Activities -----

How can I add more active play in my child care program?

Think about your weekly activity schedule. Add more active play to every day! Which of these activity ideas will you try with the 2- to 5-year-old children in your care? Put a check mark next to the ones that you will try next week.

- Allow kids to roll, pass, or kick balls to each other.** Play catch with a soft or bouncy ball.
- Create an obstacle course.** Children love to tumble over pillows, crawl through open boxes, and jump into hula hoops.
- Set up relay races or jumping games.** Dance to music or sing songs about what they are learning (for example: body parts, fruits and vegetables, or colors). Play tag, chasing games, “red light, green light,” or “musical frogs” (similar to musical chairs but with “lily pads” or pillows on the floor). Try **noncompetitive games** where **all** children play, instead of games where children **wait** to play or must be picked to participate.
- Play Octopus Tag by drawing two lines at least 20 feet apart.** When the “octopus” in the middle says “hungry!”, the other children (the “fish”) should try to cross to the other side while the octopus tries to tag them. When a fish is tagged, he becomes the octopus’s arm and has to hold hands with the octopus, working with him to try to tag the other fish. The last fish left wins!
- Add fun to games by using pool noodles, beach balls, and hula hoops.** Try *Noodle Limbo*, *Cooperation Carry*, or *Musical Hoops*. Visit www.headstartbodystart.org for ideas.
- Set up a hula hoop game.** With all children standing in a single file line, give the first child in the line one hula hoop to hold over his or her head. The child will pull the hula hoop down over his or her body to the floor, step out of it, and give the hoop to the next person in line.
- Act out different animals** – hop like a rabbit, jump like a kangaroo, or waddle like a duck!
- Teach children math, science, and language concepts** through games involving movement. For example, children can learn to count by tossing bean bags into a bowl.
- Plan a “movement parade.”** March around the room or outside, while calling out different movements children can do: hop, skip, leap, twirl, twist, jump, stomp, and more.
- Provide two or more 5- to 10-minute periods of adult-led active play** or games that promote physical activity every day. Try “follow-the-leader” or walk in your neighborhood or park. Play musical movement games, such as “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes,” “Hokey Pokey,” and “If You’re Happy and You Know It.”
- See the *Let’s Move Child Care Web site* for more activity ideas.** <http://healthykidshealthyfuture.org/content/hkhf/home/activities.html>

List some other ideas you have for active play.





My Notes:

