

# Developing child fitness and diet



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## **Children Fitness and Diet**

Fitness and exercise for children is quite different than that for adults.

Children's motivation and their physical capacity are different as is their adaptability to, and benefit from, different types of activity.

Generally speaking, physical fitness for children should ideally involve:

- Being active because they wish to be active, confident and to enjoy activity.
- Running and moving, especially in activity bursts. Children don't have to imitate the adult equation of "maintaining a heart rate in a target area for half an hour." Children sprint and rest, sprint and rest. Ideally children should accumulate significant "total movement time" every day.

The automatic activity of children develops their competence and their confidence in the motor skills. Their skills and confidence will influence their enjoyment of all activities – for we all enjoy to accomplish things that we excel at.

## **The Critical Right Start**

From a young age, children begin labelling themselves either as athletic, or not. Feeling competent on a field, a court, the playground or even just in a back yard will lead to a continued keenness to play, which in turn leads to more learning and thus greater success. Unfortunately, the opposite is also quite true – getting away to a bad start may cause children to want sit out physical activities, thus missing an opportunity to fully develop during their

key growth years while also exacerbating their self-doubt about their individual athleticism can grow into a self-fulfilling prophesy.

Each child can and should try to be successful athletically, and the skills required to be successful are quite learnable for more or less any child, provided that:

- The child receives individually delivered instructions to learn the proper technique for each skill at their competence level.
- Children perform the repetitions necessary that build the “muscle memory” for a particular technique.

The challenge is that most available resources to develop skills for children fall short on one or even both points. Many PE, coaches and sports classes adopt a sink-or-swim technique of teaching that simply sets children up for a failure, while tedious and repetitive practice sessions are conducted, that most children do not really enjoy beyond a few minutes.

Those children who on a regular basis are physically active will automatically reap huge benefits, it is also common sense that those children benefit from regular exercise:

- Are less liable to be overweight
- Will have a diminished risk of developing type 2 diabetes
- Have a reduced blood cholesterol level plus lower blood pressure
- Will have higher self-esteem and confidence with reduced instances of depression and anxiety
- Are more likely to have stronger bones and muscles

- Will be more mentally attentive at school
- Have a better outlook on life

Clearly we understand that it is essential that children need to be active, now it is time to get the children up, about, playing and participating.

## **The Other Benefits of Exercise**

In addition to the health rewards of regular exercise, those kids that are fit physically will sleep more soundly and be better equipped to deal with those challenges, both physical and emotional that a typical day presents — whether that is running for a bus, bending to tie a shoe lace or studying for a test.

The American Heart Association recommends:

- Participating in a minimum of 30 minutes of enjoyable, moderate intensity physical activity each day is essential for every child aged 2 or more. These activities should be developmentally appropriate and varied.

If your child does not have a full one hour break each day, then it is vital to provide at the very minimum a half hour break, and this can be split into 15 minute breaks or three x 10-minute breaks when they can engage in vigorous activities suitable to their age, gender and their stage of physical and emotional progress.

Any concerns about your child's physical or overall health should be discussed with their pediatrician.

## Get moving

Getting physically active is very important for young and growing bodies. A considerable percentage of children are overweight or obese. So encouraging an active lifestyle for them along with a balanced diet is a sure way to maintain a healthy weight:

- Ideally children should do at least 1 hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day. That could be dancing, running, swimming, or an organized sport such as football, netball or simply active play.
- Restrict if possible, a child to about two hours of watching television, using a computer or playing electronic games per day.
- Try to be active with your own and your friend's children and include physical activity for them in family outings and integrate this into the fabric of daily family life.

Focus on fun.

It is not necessary to call it “ exercise,” simply consider it as an activity. Find out those activities which the child likes and encourage those.

- Limit computer and TV time. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests not greater than “ two hours of exposure to daily media” for children aged two and older. When the child is engrossed with a screen, make sure breaks are taken and that they move around.
- Schedule the play dates. The key word is “ play.” Have the child get together with a friend or two and play a game of tag, or throw or kick a ball about.

Put up a basketball net and shoot hoops.

Give fitness oriented gifts, consider a jump-rope, a mini-trampoline or a hula-hoop — something that will encourage activity and movement. Be a model of fitness. It is far easier to motivate children to be active, if as a parent or adult you also lead an active lifestyle. Whether one follows a structured fitness program or you regularly execute some morning stretches, let the children see you being active. It will usually likely inspire them also to do likewise.

- Encourage biking or walking whenever possible.

This is easier if your home is near stores, a library or other locations that you all regularly frequent. However If you live in a more remote area, then establish a safe route for a bike ride or hike with the child.

- Be a fitness promoter at the child's school.

How much physical activity does your child get at school? Find out and if you feel it is less then enroll support from the other parents to initiate positive changes.

## **The Many Benefits of Exercise**

Everyone will benefit with regular exercise. Kids that are active develop:

- tougher bones and muscles
- a lean body shape, for regular exercise controls body fat
- be less likely to become overweight
- decrease the risk of developing type 2 diabetes
- possibly lower blood pressure and blood cholesterol levels
- have a better outlook on life

In addition to positive health benefits of exercising regularly, children that are physically fitter will also sleep more soundly and are better prepared to handle those emotional and physical challenges which a typical day may present — such as running to catch a bus, bending to tie a shoelace or studying for a test.

The American Heart Association recommends:

- That children aged 2 years or older benefit greatly from at a minimum of 30 minutes of fun and moderately intense physical exercise each day.

Those activities should be developmentally appropriate and also varied. If a child does not receive a full 30 minute break for active play each day:

- Then try to provide at minimum two x 15-minute periods or
- three x 10-minute periods, where the child may perform a vigorous activity which is suitable for their gender, age and their level of physical and emotional development.

Any worries about a child's physical or overall health must be discussed with a pediatrician.

## **Encouraging healthy habits**

The smart way to inspire our children to be healthy and active is to be a role model. Help them filter the information regarding the food they are receiving and be led by example. Remember that food is much more than just nutrients and fuel. To children, food should be fun, should taste good, and food should be social - to be enjoyed!

## **Having a healthy diet**

Parents are the primary influence upon the diet of children, for they directly control many of the food choices, and especially at a younger ages. Active, growing children absolutely require balanced nutrition so that their bodies grow healthily. Most attitudes about food are formed during the early school years, thus creating the foundation of future eating habits. We can help our children create a health foundation by encouraging a like of good food and nutrition throughout the formative years.

## **Growing bodies**

The primary school years are busy and children require good nutrition in order to concentrate at school and also to fuel their daily activities (play and sport). Equally children need nutritious foods to develop and grow normally.

An eating pattern which includes a variety of foods from across different food groups provides children with a range of nutrients and also the fuel they need.

- Eating sufficient fresh vegetables, legumes and fruits
- Eating sufficient cereals (preferably whole-grain), to include bread, pasta, rice, and noodles
- Lean meat, poultry, fish, and/or alternatives
- Include milk, cheese and yoghurt (the fat reduced products are not suitable for children under 2 years of age)

While the occasional ‘extra’ treats such as iced lollies, French fries and take away foods are ok, if they are eaten too often and become habitual, then not only are the children liable to want more and more, it also will result in a



decline of the nourishing foods while increasing the risk of becoming overweight, as well as the heightened risk of tooth decay.

- Children need to be well hydrated.
- Children must be encouraged to drink water.
- Try limiting sugar infused drinks such as soda's, soft drinks, cordials and even fruit juices. If consumed regularly they will contribute to issues like excess weight and tooth decay.
- A glass full of milk is very nutritious to drink and contributes to the recommended three servings of dairy per day that ensures children get the calcium that growing bones require.

## **Importance of dairy foods**

As one of the five food groups, dairy products play a crucial role in a healthy diet. Milk, cheese and yoghurt contain over 10 essential nutrients:

- Carbohydrates
- Proteins
- Minerals (magnesium, calcium, potassium and zinc, phosphorus,)
- Vitamins (A, B12 and riboflavin)
- Healthy strong bones

Dairy foods are well known for providing calcium and its effect upon building strong bones. Naturally, the bones of children grow rapidly, therefore a calcium-rich diet in childhood will maximise peak bone mass and help reduce any risk of fractures and osteoporosis later in life.

Three servings of dairy foods per day will give children most of the required calcium requirements. One serving of a dairy product equates as:

- 1 glass (= 250mL) of milk
- 2 slices (= 40g) of cheese
- 1 tub (= 200g) of yoghurt

Milk, cheese and yoghurt also provide at least nine other vital nutrients - vitamin A for good eye sight, protein and zinc for development and growth, and vitamin B12 to keep the blood healthy.

## **Dental health**

Tooth decay is still a common health problem in children, despite being largely preventable. In addition to oral hygiene such as regular brushing, correct nutrition and eating habits are important in preventing dental disease. Special anti-decay nutrients such as phosphorus, and calcium, are contained in the milk proteins and therefore dairy foods are a unique combination with a specific preventative role in dental health.

## **Breakfast**

Everyone knows that breakfast is the most crucial meal of a day and especially so for energising the minds and bodies of children's before school. Low Glycaemic Index (GI) foods that provide a slow release of energy are preferable breakfast choices. Dairy foods contain a low GI.

In winter start a day with a steaming and hot milky porridge and then in the warmer months put some ice cold milk on a child's favourite cereal.

- Yoghurt and muesli mix. Great in a yoghurt container for a breakfast on the move.
- Grilled cheese on toast, a perennial favourite.
- A Fruit and yoghurt smoothie. Lovely for children who dislike breakfast.

## **Lunch**

Dairy foods are good for the school lunch box.

- Portions of cheese with biscuits and dried fruit.
- Sandwiches or pita bread with cheese and a choice of spread with salad.
- Freeze a yoghurt tub the previous night. Helps keep a lunch box cool.

## **Snacks**

- Ice cold milk shake or a smoothie is a great filler.
- Use crackers and vegetable sticks to eat a yoghurt based dip.

When it comes to instilling healthy habits, you can teach children their “  
ABCDE”

Act Boldly to Change Diet and Exercise.