



Fitness and Your 2- to 3-Year-Old

Kids this age are learning to master basic movements like walking, running, kicking, and throwing. They're naturally active, so be sure to provide lots of opportunities for your child to practice and build on these skills.

How much is enough? According to the National Association of Sports and Physical Education, each day toddlers should:

- get at least 30 minutes of structured physical activity (adult-led)
- get at least 60 minutes unstructured physical activity (free play)
- not be inactive for more than 1 hour at a time (except for sleeping)

What Kids Can Do

It's important to understand what kids can do and what skills are appropriate for this age. By age 2, toddlers should be able to walk, run, and jump in place with both feet. By age 3, most kids can run and jump well. In addition, they'll learn to balance briefly on one foot, climb well, kick the ball forward, throw the ball overhand, and pedal a tricycle.

Keep these skills in mind when encouraging your child to be active. Play games together and provide age-appropriate active toys, such as balls, push and pull toys, and riding vehicles.

Mommy-and-me programs can introduce toddlers to tumbling, dance, and general movement. But you don't have to enroll kids in a formal program to foster these skills. The most important thing is to provide lots of opportunities to be active in a safe environment.

Family Fitness Tips

Kids who like to engage in active play now are likely to stay active and be physically fit in the future. Walking, playing, exploring your backyard or using playground equipment at a local park can be fun for the entire family.

Also, these games provide fun and fitness for parents and toddlers:

- Walk like a penguin, hop like a frog, or imitate other animals' movements.
- Sit facing each other and hold hands. Rock back and forth and sing the song "Row, row, row your boat."
- Bend at the waist and touch the ground. Walk your hands forward and inch along like a caterpillar.
- Sit on the ground and let your child step over your legs, or make a bridge with your body and let your child crawl under.

- Play follow the leader, "Ring around the rosy," and other similar games.
- Listen to music and dance together.

The possibilities are endless — come up with your own active ideas or follow your child's lead. Also, limit the amount of time your child spends watching TV (including DVDs and videos) or playing on a computer.

When to Call the Doctor

If your toddler refuses to play or interact with other kids, or complains of pain during or after play, talk with your doctor.

Kids who are active at young age tend to stay active throughout their lives. And staying fit can improve self-esteem, help maintain a healthy weight, and decrease the risk of serious illnesses, such as high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease.

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