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## Fitness and Your 6- to 12-Year-Old

Kids this age need physical activity to build strength, coordination, confidence, and to lay the groundwork for a healthy lifestyle. They're also gaining more control over how active they are.

School-age kids should have many opportunities to participate in a variety of activities, sports, and games that fit for their personality, ability, age, and interests. Brainstorm with your kids on activities that feel right. Most kids won't mind a daily dose of fitness as long as it's fun.

The National Association for Sports and Physical Education recommends that school-age kids:

- get 1 hour or more of moderate and vigorous physical activity on most or all days
- also participate in several bouts of physical activity of 15 minutes or more each day
- avoid periods of inactivity of 2 hours or more

### Fitness at Home

Many parents and kids think of organized sports when they think of fitness. Though there are many advantages to signing a child up for the softball team, practice and games once or twice a week will not be enough to reach activity goals. In addition, parents can no longer rely on physical education in the schools to provide enough physical activity for kids.

Here are some ways to keep your kids moving at home:

- Incorporate physical activity into the daily routine. From household chores to an after-dinner walk, keep your family active every day.
- Allow enough time for free play. Kids can burn more calories and have more fun when left to their own devices. Playing tag, riding bikes around the neighborhood, and building snowmen are fun and healthy.
- Keep a variety of games and sports equipment on hand. It doesn't have to be expensive — an assortment of balls, hula-hoops, and jump ropes can keep kids busy for hours.
- Be active together. It'll get you moving and kids love to play with their parents.
- Limit time spent in sedentary activities, such as watching TV, going online, and playing video games.

When you have exhausted the possibilities at home, take advantage of local playgrounds and athletic fields. Make family fitness outings part of your regular routine. Let family members choose an activity — go hiking, ice skating, or try out the rock-climbing gym. Anything goes, as long as everyone can participate.

You can help show your kids that exercise is important by regularly exercising yourself.

## Fitness for Kids

Through physical activities, kids can learn about setting goals, meeting challenges, sportsmanship, teamwork, and the value of practice.

Keep in mind your child's age and developmental level, natural abilities, and interests. Between the ages of 6 and 8, kids are sharpening basic physical skills like jumping, throwing, kicking, and catching. Some kids enjoy doing this in organized sports teams, but non-competitive leagues are best for younger kids. Show your support by coaching your child's team or cheering from the stands on game days.

Kids who are 9 to 12 years old are refining, improving, and coordinating skills. Some become even more committed to a sport while others drop out as competition heats up and level of play improves.

It's OK if a child isn't interested in traditional sports, but it's important to find alternative ways to be active. Encourage a child who doesn't like soccer, basketball, or other team sports to explore other active options, like karate, fencing, golf, bicycling, skateboarding, and tennis.

## Preventing Problems

Kids who participate in sports are at risk for injuries, so be sure yours wear the appropriate protective equipment, such as a helmet and protective pads when roller-blading. Kids who specialize in one sport are also at risk of overuse injuries, including stress fractures and joint injuries.

A child with a chronic health condition or disability should not be excluded from fitness activities. Some activities may need to be modified or adapted, and some may be too risky depending on the condition. Consult your doctor about which activities are safe for your child.

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

If your child refuses to play or interact with peers, or complains of pain during activity, talk with your doctor.

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