



NATIONAL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES ACTIVE CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Physical activity is important for children's development and, more importantly, is lots of fun. There are many options available to children and teenagers and they should be encouraged to be active on a daily basis. Leisure activities that involve only small amounts of movement – such as surfing the internet and watching television – should be limited.

Guidelines for children and adolescents

Recommendations from the National Heart Foundation of Australia encourage children and teenagers to participate in vigorous activity on a regular basis in addition to the recommended 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity on most days.

Children and adolescents could be physically active as part of play, games, sports, work, transportation, recreation, physical education or planned exercise while involved in family, school and community activities.

Physical benefits

Physical activity, in conjunction with healthy eating, helps maintain healthy body weight in children. Physical activity also contributes to healthy bone development and has been shown to reduce high blood pressure in children.

Mental health benefits

Physical activity has positive effects on children's self-esteem, levels of anxiety, stress and depressed moods. Young people's participation in physical activity and sports may also protect them from taking up cigarette smoking, alcohol use and illegal drug use.

Longer-term benefits

It is possible that active children may be more likely to become active adults. Some studies have shown that children who are physically active continue to be active into adulthood, reducing their risk of cardiovascular and other chronic diseases in later life.

Healthy eating is important

To maintain healthy body weight in children and adolescents, it is essential to combine physical activity with healthy eating habits. The *National Health and Medical Research Council Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents* in Australia emphasise that a healthy diet should include a variety of breads, cereal, fruits and vegetables; lean meat, fish, poultry; milks, yoghurts, cheeses; moderate intakes of added sugar; limited salt intake; limited saturated fat and moderate fat intake and to enjoy water as a drink.

Recommendations for parents

- Limit access to sedentary recreation such as TV, videos, computers and video games;
- Ensure there are enjoyable activities available as an alternative to sedentary recreation, such as bike riding, inviting friends over to play or taking children to a park, pool or beach;
- Spend time playing with children and teaching them basic skills like catching and throwing. This will build their confidence at sports, making them more likely to continue to participate in physical activity.

For more information about Physical Activity and Health and to obtain a copy of the National Physical Activity Guidelines, please visit the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing's Nutrition and Physical Activity website at: <http://www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/strateg/active/index.htm>

For more information about Walk to Work Day, please visit the Walk to Work Day website at: www.walk.com.au

