

GUIDELINES FOR HEALTHY GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUR CHILD



Australian Government
Department of Health

THE EARLY YEARS (BIRTH TO 5 YEARS)



Australian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for the Early Years
(birth to 5 years): *An Integration of Physical Activity, Sedentary
Behaviour, and Sleep*

PREAMBLE

These Guidelines are relevant to all apparently healthy infants (less than 1 year), toddlers (1–2 years), and pre-schoolers (3–5 years), irrespective of gender, cultural or language background, geographic location, or socio-economic status of the family. These guidelines may be appropriate for young children with a disability or medical condition; however, a health professional should be consulted for additional guidance.

To promote healthy growth and development, young children should receive support from parents and family, educators and caregivers that allows for an active lifestyle with a daily balance of physical activities, sedentary behaviours, and sleep. Young children should participate in a range of developmentally appropriate, enjoyable and safe play-based and structured physical activities in a variety of environments (e.g., home/early childhood education and care/community; indoors/outdoors; land/water; summer/winter), both independently as well as interacting with adults and other children. For infants, supervised activities could include tummy time, reaching and grasping, pushing and pulling, and crawling. The quality of sedentary behaviour matters; for example, interactive non-screen based behaviours (e.g., reading, storytelling, singing, puzzles) are encouraged. Developing healthy sleep hygiene in the early years is important; this includes having a calming bedtime routine with consistent sleep and wake times, avoiding screen time before sleep, and keeping screens out of the bedroom.

Following these Guidelines through the early years is associated with better growth, cardiorespiratory and musculoskeletal fitness, cognitive development, psychosocial health/emotional regulation, motor development, body composition, quality of life/well-being, as well as reduced injuries. The benefits of following these Guidelines exceed potential harms.

For those not currently meeting these 24-hour Movement Guidelines, a progressive adjustment toward them is recommended. Adhering to these Guidelines may be challenging at times; resources are available for assistance www.health.gov.au.

These Guidelines were informed by the best available evidence, expert consensus, stakeholder consultation, and consideration of values and preferences, applicability, feasibility, resource use (cost) and equity. The specific guidelines and more details on the background research, their interpretation, guidance on how to achieve them, and recommendations for further research and surveillance are available at www.health.gov.au.

GUIDELINES

To promote healthy growth and development, infants, toddlers, and pre-schoolers should achieve the recommended balance of physical activity, high-quality sedentary behaviour, and sufficient sleep.

INFANTS (AGED < 1 YEAR)

For infants, a healthy 24 hours includes:

- **Physical activity:** Being physically active several times in a variety of ways, particularly through interactive floor-based play; more is better. For those not yet mobile, this includes at least 30 minutes of tummy time spread throughout the day while awake;
- **Sedentary behaviour:** Not being restrained for more than 1 hour at a time (e.g., in a stroller, car seat or high chair). Screen time is not recommended. When sedentary, engaging in pursuits such as reading and storytelling with a caregiver is encouraged; and
- **Sleep:** 14 to 17 hours (for those aged 0-3 months) and 12 to 16 hours (for those aged 4-11 months) of good quality sleep, including naps.

TODDLERS (AGED 1–2 YEARS)

For toddlers, a healthy 24 hours includes:

- **Physical activity:** At least 180 minutes spent in a variety of physical activities including energetic play, spread throughout the day; more is better;
- **Sedentary Behaviour:** Not being restrained for more than 1 hour at a time (e.g., in a stroller, car seat or high chair) or sitting for extended periods. For those younger than 2 years, sedentary screen time is not recommended. For those aged 2 years, sedentary screen time should be no more than 1 hour; less is better. When sedentary, engaging in pursuits such as reading and storytelling with a caregiver is encouraged; and
- **Sleep:** 11 to 14 hours of good quality sleep, including naps, with consistent sleep and wake-up times.

PRE-SCHOOLERS (AGED 3–5 YEARS)

For pre-schoolers, a healthy 24 hours includes:

- **Physical activity:** At least 180 minutes spent in a variety of physical activities, of which at least 60 minutes is energetic play, spread throughout the day; more is better;
- **Sedentary behaviour:** Not being restrained for more than 1 hour at a time (e.g., in a stroller or car seat) or sitting for extended periods. Sedentary screen time should be no more than 1 hour; less is better. When sedentary, engaging in pursuits such as reading and storytelling with a caregiver is encouraged; and
- **Sleep:** 10 to 13 hours of good quality sleep, which may include a nap, with consistent sleep and wake-up times.

For greater health benefits, replace time restrained or sedentary screen time with additional energetic play, while preserving sufficient sleep.