

Physical activity

Physical activity is beneficial because it can:

- help maintain a healthy weight;
- improve heart health and strengthen muscles and bones;
- improve sleep, relieve stress and lift mood.

What counts?

Children and young people (aged 5-18 years) should do 60 minutes of physical activity every day, ranging from moderate to vigorous intensity. On three days of the week this should include exercises to strengthen muscles and bones, such as gymnastics, dancing, swinging on playground equipment, playing tennis, sit-ups, press ups and football.

Moderate intensity activity

Moderate intensity physical activity will increase body temperature, increase the rate of breathing and make the heart beat faster. When exercising at a moderate level, it should be possible to talk but hard to sing a song. Examples of moderate intensity activities:

- brisk walking to school;
- playing in the playground;
- riding a scooter;
- skateboarding;
- rollerblading/skating;
- cycling

Vigorous intensity activity

Vigorous intensity physical activity will increase body temperature, make breathing even faster and heavier and make the heart beat rapidly. When exercising at this level, it is hard to say more than a few words without pausing from breath. Examples of vigorous intensity activities:

- playing chase;
- swimming;
- running;
- gymnastics and dancing;
- cycling fast or on a hilly ground;
- martial arts like karate;
- organised sports such as football, rugby, netball, tennis and badminton.

Every child will enjoy different types of physical activity so try and find out what they prefer as they are more likely to participate in activities they feel more comfortable taking part in. As well as being physically active it is important that children and young people reduce the amount of time sitting, e.g. watching TV, playing computer games, travelling by car when they could walk or cycle. This is because sedentary behaviour is bad for health. Overtime it can lead to weight gain and obesity which can increase the risk of developing chronic diseases in adulthood such as heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes.

For more information, go to www.nutrition.org.uk