



Exercise helps kids learn



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INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Insights is produced by Marcia Latta, communications consultant.

Active children do better in school. Many studies have found a mind/body connection linking increased blood and oxygen flow during physical activity to enhanced brain function and improved moods through the release of “feel-good” endorphin hormones.

This mood and wellness boost from regular physical activity also includes better classroom concentration, more energy, greater confidence and improved sleep.

Exercise offers substantial health benefits

Aside from obvious physical benefits of regular activity, there are enormous mental health benefits, including lower stress and anxiety. Experts say physical activity enables a better outlook on life by building confidence, managing anxiety and depression and increasing cognitive abilities.

Students who engage in physical activity that they enjoy also see fewer behavioral health disorders. The key is finding exercises that your child wants to do and motivating them to get up and move.

Help your child get moving

Physical activity is essential to children's health. It can be a challenge to get the recommended 60 minutes of activity every day. With homework, television and computer games competing for your child's time, getting enough exercise takes guidance and planning.

What counts?

If health experts recommend a minimum of 60 minutes of movement each day, what does that include? It should be moderate or vigorous aerobic activity, like typical playground activity. In addition, children should do muscle-strengthening and bone-strengthening activities at least three days a week. This doesn't have to mean lifting weights — jumping rope counts, too.

Tips to move more

Exercise is a lifelong habit for good health. Starting early means greater and longer benefits.

Set a good example. Model an active lifestyle for your child. Make physical activity a priority for yourself and your whole family. Make it fun for your child, but don't stress. Good activities include playing catch or taking a walk or hike.

Limit screen time. Set time limits on screen time. Don't place a TV

in kids' bedrooms. Turn it off during meal times. If they enjoy video games, choose active ones, such as dance or team sports.

Establish a routine. Set aside daily active time for activity. Take the dog for a morning walk or head outside before or after dinner.

Listen to your child. Team sports don't appeal to all children. Choose activities they like, and be sure to introduce new ones. Make it easy: dance in the living room or bike around the block. Play tag on the way to the mailbox.

Promote activity, not exercise. Make it about fun; not a chore that they may resist. Let your child choose the activity for the day or week. It doesn't matter what it is as long as it's active and fun. Search your memory for classic kids' games, such as red light/green light, tag and touch football. For more ideas, do a web search for kids' fitness activities.

Exercise recommendations for children

Ages 3 to 5

Engage in a variety of activity throughout the day. Go to the playground. Play ball in the backyard. Chase the dog.

Ages 6-17

Kids in this age group can do anything they choose, but a combination of aerobics, muscle-strengthening and bone-strengthening options are best. Think push-ups, pull-ups, burpees, mountain climbers.

Creative exercise ideas for the family

- 1. Create an obstacle course in the house or garden.** Print out a certificate for completion or time them. Hold a parents vs. kids challenge!
- 2. Play yoga games.** Yoga games for kids are fun and improve overall body awareness. Do a web search for directions.
- 3. Join the gym, and sign your kids up too.** Some gyms offer special kids-only areas where kids get to climb walls and take challenges. Get your child their own gear — water bottle, towel, gym bag. Next time you go, take them along.
- 4. Do a Hula Hoop workout.** Turn up the music at home and challenge each other to see who can go for the longest time or who can hoola with the most hoops.
- 5. Make it an outing.** Get out of the house and try something new. Ice-skating, rock climbing, roller-skating, and mountain biking are a fun way to beat boredom.
- 6. Sneak in a little bit of exercise.** Don't park as close as you can to the mall; park farther away and walk. Take the stairs instead of the elevator, if possible. You can even turn this into a game by guessing how many stairs there are and counting them to find out who was the closest when you reach your destination.

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