



active play everyday

Factsheet No: 5

Active play: tips for parents and carers

Physical activity is vital for a child's development and lays the foundation for a healthy and active life. And when it comes to kids, the best form of physical activity is play!



What is active play?

Active play is essentially physical activity with spontaneous and occasional bursts of high energy. It can occur indoors or outdoors, alone or with friends and family. Even before children can walk, they can start playing. As they get older and learn more skills, opportunities for active play increase.

Why is active play so important?

Active play is important for your child's health, growth and development. Regular activity and play has many benefits for children. These include:

- building strong hearts, muscles and bones.
- fostering social interaction skills.
- developing movement and co-ordination.
- improving thinking skills.
- encouraging self-esteem.
- developing emotional skills.

The play environment

A positive, safe environment is very important for indoor or outdoor play. Being outdoors has the added benefit of providing children with space to carry out 'gross motor' activities such as jumping, running, climbing and leaping at different speeds. Outdoor play also allows children to get to know their environment and connect with nature.

Parents and children should be sun smart when outdoors. For example, wear long-sleeved polo shirts, knee length shorts, and wide-brimmed hats. Also, make sure you regularly apply 30+ sunscreen.

How much activity?

Active play is essential for all children. The National Physical Activity Recommendations for children are that toddlers (1 to 3 years) and preschoolers (3 to 5 years) should be physically active every day for at least three hours, spread throughout the day.¹

Active transport

Wherever possible, try to leave the car at home and instead walk or ride to your location. Young children should be encouraged to walk as much as possible, gradually increasing the distance. Children older than two years should not be completely dependent on a stroller. Try to make this the least preferred transport option, except when they are travelling long distances.

Role of parents and carers

Parents are important role models and should be active with their children every day. Try to also plan some opportunities for the whole family to be active on a weekly basis. Carers and other family members, such as grandparents, can also share in the fun and responsibility of planning activities. It's good to keep play items in your car and at home which assist in creating opportunities for play, such as blow-up beach balls, soccer balls, bats, and buckets and spades.

To access the other factsheets in this series, please visit:

www.kidsatplay.act.gov.au



An ACT Government initiative delivered in partnership with Heart Foundation ACT

¹Get Up & Grow: healthy eating and physical activity for early childhood, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing 2009



How do I encourage active play?

What if my child does not appear to enjoy the activity?

Enjoyment of active play varies from child to child and getting them to participate is not always easy. Make sure you provide them with a positive, safe environment and give them plenty of encouragement and support. Simple, fun activities like playing with other children and using slower soft toys may help attract a child's interest. Repetition and other game-type challenges can also make a difference, especially if they don't involve too much competition. Skills take time to develop and children may need to try a number of play activities until they find one they like. Be a good, active role model.

Guide for active play development*

Age	Movement	Ideas To Encourage Active Play
3 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rolls to back from lying on his or her side. Can lie on stomach and lean on forearms. Head is in middle (that is, it is not always on one side.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place child safely on the floor.
6 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rolls from back to stomach using arms crossing over the body. Brings feet to mouth. May begin to sit. When lying on stomach can push up on hands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place child safely on the floor. If the child is beginning to sit, place him or her on the floor, supported with pillows.
9 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bears weight on hand and knees and rocks back and forth. Sits for longer time. May begin to crawl – some children begin to walk. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place child safely on floor. As the child gets active, ensure environment is safe by having gates on stairs and low windows shut.
1 Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walks holding onto furniture. Lowers to sitting from furniture. Stands alone for a few seconds. Maybe walking a few steps by themselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place child on floor. Walking surface should be firm and even.
1.5 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walks backwards. Carries large toy while walking. Pushes large toys or boxes. Backs into chair. Throws ball in box. Beginning to run. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage child to walk on different surfaces such as floors, grassy areas, pathways. Roll a large ball near the child and encourage the child to bend and pick up and throw back. Have push toys in the settings so the child can walk and push an object (this helps with stability).
2 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goes up and down the slide. Stands on tiptoes. Squats in play. Jumps from bottom step. Runs without bumping into things. Walks downstairs two feet per step without help. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go on trips to the local park. Play run and chase. Encourage child to walk on lots of different surfaces such as floors, grass, footpaths, sand, uneven surfaces. Crawl over large cushions.
2.5 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jumps sideways and jumps backwards. Can jump on trampoline holding hands with an adult. Begins to hop on one foot. Begins to use pedals on trike. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go on trips to the local park. Provide a space for the child to play. Provide equipment such as a push-trike, tricycle, balls and large cushions.
3 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walks downstairs one step at a time with alternate feet. Climbs jungle gym and ladders. Runs on toes. Skilled at turning corners when running. Balances on one leg for short time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go to the local park and encourage climbing on safe playground equipment. Play chase and jumping games.
3.5 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stands on tiptoes for 10 seconds. Walks in a circle. Kicks a ball from a standing position. Rides a tricycle with pedals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In play space, lay a plank of wood on the ground for the child to walk on to practise balancing and walking. Provide balls, tricycle, climbing opportunities.
4 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can perform a somersault. Maintains momentum on swing. Gallops. Kicks large rolling ball. Does lame duck skip (only one foot 'skips'). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go to the local park and playground. Play animal games where child pretends to move like different animals. Play run and chase. Provide balls and a rope to jump over.
4.5 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Throws a ball 3.5 metres overhand. Hangs from a bar using overhand grip. Hops forward. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go to the local playground and park. Encourage play with smaller balls (e.g. tennis ball).
5 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walks downstairs carrying an object. Runs through obstacle course avoiding objects. Skips forward. Maintains balance on a moveable platform. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go to local playground and park. Provide rope for skipping, planks of wood on ground to balance on, box tunnels to crawl through, balls to throw, and objects to run around.

*Please note: This is a guide only. If you have any concerns regarding the growth and development of your child please consult with your Maternal and Child Health Nurse or your General Practitioner.

For more activity ideas please visit www.kidsatplay.act.gov.au This website was funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing

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