

PhysicallyFIT

whip your child into shape!

by Solomon Brenner



The percentage of children who are obese has doubled over the past thirty years. There are several contributing factors to this epidemic. A primary issue is that children are not staying as active as they used to. Kids need approximately sixty minutes of moderate to strenuous activity a day; something they miss if the hours are spent in front of the TV or computer. Parents should incorporate scheduled activities as well as free time to play into their children's daily routines to ensure that they are taking part in the three elements of fitness: strength, endurance and flexibility.

When adults think of strength, we think of weight training. Children, on the other hand, do not need a formal weight training session to be strong. Push-ups, pull-ups and crunches are great ways to build muscle without ever picking up any weights. Your children's muscles are also being worked during play time when they are swinging from the monkey bars or doing handstands.

Endurance is developed through aerobic activity, which strengthens the heart and improves the body's ability to deliver oxygen to its cells. While adults may hit the gym and jump on the treadmill, kids develop their endurance from outside activities like playing tag, swimming or skating. The possibilities for kids' endurance training are limitless when they are outside playing.

Flexibility is developed through stretching exercises. While getting a child to sit down and do yoga seems preposterous, they test their flexibility other ways. Everyday activities like practicing flips and splits, touching their toes or try-

ing to get things that are just out of their reach increases children's flexibility. This allows muscles and joints to bend easily through their full range of motion.

Young children should not stay inactive for longer than an hour at a time, other than when they are sleeping. School-age children should not be inactive for longer than two hours at a time. This means parents must limit the amount of time they spend in front of the TV, computer or video gaming systems. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children spend no more than two hours a day watching quality programming.

To raise a fit kid, help your child get involved in activities that are suitable to his or her age. Incorporate activity into daily routines, such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator. When you establish a regular schedule for physical activity, be sure to make it something your child will enjoy. Putting a positive light on fitness will make it something that your child sticks with throughout his or

her life. It is also important to embrace a healthy lifestyle for yourself to set a good example for your children.

Avoiding child obesity is not the only benefit of exercise and healthy eating. Exercise will give your child stronger muscles and bones as well as a leaner body. It will also lower your child's risk for type two diabetes, and can lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Exercise and healthy living makes children feel good about themselves and gives them self-confidence. Starting early increases the chance that they will continue these good habits throughout their lives. Kids who are physically fit also sleep better and are better equipped to deal with the physical and emotional challenges of a typical day, like running to catch a bus, bending down to tie their shoes or studying for a test.



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