



Fingerprints

A Newsletter about Little Hands and Those Who Care for Them

Spring 2016

Preschoolers and Play

Most of us envy the energy that preschoolers have. They seem to be in constant motion...running, spinning, leaping and climbing at every opportunity. Their desire to move, move, move makes this a great time to encourage fitness habits that will last.

Children need to be fit for the same reasons as adults: to improve their health and make sure that their bodies can do what they need them to do. Regular exercise helps kids grow, build strong muscles and bones, develop important motor skills and boost self-esteem.

You may think it strange to think about “motivating” a preschooler to be active since they are active most of the time. Yet it’s important that

they play and be active several times daily in order to establish good fitness habits. So what should adults do? You already know what will motivate this age group best: fun!

To keep active time fun, know what activities are best for your child’s age group and make having a good time the top priority. For example, preschoolers might whine if you drag them around the track at your local school. But if you walk through your neighborhood, stopping to admire the trees and flowers and maybe to bounce a ball while walking, the walk is more appealing. Understanding which skills your child has and is working on is another key to keeping it fun. You can have a great time kicking a ball back and forth together

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Baby Stress Relief

You’re probably an expert on stress. Juggling work, kids and getting dinner on the table....you probably know more about it than you ever wanted to. When your kids see you stressing out, they may stress out also. They learn from the people around them. If you take a breath, have a stretch or laugh a little, your baby will see you coping with stress in a positive way plus your kids will learn positive ways to cope with stress from your example.

So what is stress? When you feel anxious or in danger, your body produces stress hormones such as cortisol. These hormones cause physical changes in your body. You might get sweaty palms, experience rapid or shallow breathing, feel like your heart is pounding and experience loss (or increase) of appetite. But stress isn’t always a bad thing. In fact, healthy stress (called the fight or flight reaction) is essential for survival. Increased levels of stress hormones give us the energy to respond quickly and even calm down when coping with real emergencies. But when we experience stress all the time,

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but your child probably won't have much fun if put into soccer game with all the rules enforced.

What about team sports at this age? Although many parents are ready to enroll their preschooler in organized sports, it's really not recommended until they are a little older. There's no need to be concerned that your child will "fall behind" other kids when it comes to their soccer or baseball/softball careers. Preschoolers are better off working on basic skills, which they can apply later when they can better grasp sports rules and understand their role in a game.

Look for chances to be active away from home. At a child care center or preschool, do kids have access to a playground or large indoor space for play? The games and equipment don't need to be fancy. Kids enjoy simple games such as catch and tag, playing with plastic bats and balls, dancing and tumbling. And they still like to play games such as "Duck, Duck, Goose," London Bridge," "I'm a Little Tea Pot" or "Simon Says."

Preschoolers are working on skills such as hopping, balancing on one foot, throwing and catching balls, pedaling tricycles and

skipping. The benefits will pay off now and later, says the National Association for Sports and Physical Education (NASPE). When kids learn these basic skills now, it builds confidence and makes it more likely that they'll continue to be physically active as they grow up. NASPE also recommends that preschoolers get at least 60 minutes of structured (adult-led) physical activity a day.

A little freedom can also motivate preschoolers to be active. Though some of their physical activity should be structured and led by adults, it pays to let them take the lead sometimes. NASPE recommends that preschoolers get at least 60 minutes of unstructured physical activity (free play) a day. Encourage active free play, which means letting kids choose the activity and make decisions about what they do, all within a safe and supervised environment. This could include exploring the back yard, running around the playground, or playing dress-up.

One important message is that your preschooler is clearly keeping an eye on how you spend your time, so set a good example by exercising regularly. Your child will pick up on this as something parents do and will naturally want to do it, too.

Here are some other ways to encourage physical activity:

*Limit screen time. When you do, kids often find more active stuff to do. Allow no more than 1 to 2 hours per day of quality programming. Though lots of computer programs are marketed to preschoolers, none are necessary for their development. If you decide to allow computer use, carefully choose the software and the websites your child can visit.

*Keep it fun. Help find activities your child likes and then offer many opportunities to enjoy them. Keep equipment and supplies on hand and, if possible, within easy reach for your preschooler.

*Supervise closely. Preschoolers' physical abilities, like climbing to the top of a playground tower, often exceed their ability to judge what's safe and what's dangerous. Likewise, they don't know when it's time to take a break on a hot day. Part of helping kids have fun outdoors means making sure that they do so safely, so keep a close eye on your child. And don't forget a water bottle, snack and sunscreen. !

Reviewed by Ryan J. Brogan, DO, October 2014, <http://kidshealth.org>.

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health problems may occur.

Babies experience stress when their needs aren't met. They tend to cry when they're hungry, need to be changed, or are getting too much or too little attention. Not responding to a crying baby can cause your baby to feel stress. When stressed, babies need your help to calm down. They aren't born knowing how to handle stress because their brains are still developing. That's why babies need help from grownups in calming down. Research shows that babies whose cries are soothed quickly tend to cry less, not more. Keep in mind that responding to your baby's cries doesn't train him to cry just to get your attention.

You can't protect your baby from everything that causes stress. But you can soothe him. And that, in turn, teaches him how to soothe himself. This skill will help your baby throughout his life. Don't assume that letting a baby handle stress on his own, or crying it out, will make him a tougher or more resilient adult.

So how do you soothe your baby? Every baby is unique. One baby might be soothed by warm baths; another may want to be cuddled; and another may want to be gently rocked. You'll learn what works best for your child just by doing what comes naturally.

Source: pbs.org

Kids and Food: 10 Tips for Parents

It's no surprise that parents might need some help in understanding what it means to eat healthy. From the MyPlate food guide to the latest food fad, it can be very confusing. The good news is that you don't need a degree in nutrition to raise healthy kids. Following some basic guidelines can help you encourage your kids to eat right and maintain a healthy weight. Here are ten key rules to live by:

***Parents control the supply lines.** You decide what foods to buy and when to serve them. Though kids will annoy their parents for less nutritious foods, adults should be in charge when deciding which foods are regularly stocked in the house. Kids won't go hungry. They'll eat what's available. If their favorite snack isn't all that nutritious, you can still buy it once in a while so they don't feel deprived.

***From the foods you offer, kids get to choose what they will eat or whether to eat at all.** Kids need to have some say in the matter. Schedule regular meal and snack times. From the selections you offer, let them choose what to eat and how much of it they want. This may seem like a little too much freedom. But if you follow the first step, your kids will be choosing only from the foods you buy and serve.

***Quit the "clean plate" club.** Let kids stop eating when they feel they've had enough. Lots of parents grew up under the clean-plate rule but that approach doesn't help kids listen to their own bodies when they feel full. When kids notice and respond to feelings of fullness, they're less likely to overeat.

***Start them young.** Food preferences are developed early in life so offer variety. Likes and dislikes begin forming even when kids are babies. You may need to serve a new food up to 12-15 times before a child will accept it. Don't force your child to eat but offer a few bites. With older kids, ask them to try one bite.

***Rewrite the kids' menu.** Who says that kids only want to eat hot dogs, pizza, burger and mac and cheese? When eating out, let your kids try new foods...they might surprise you with their willingness to experiment. Start off by letting them try a little of whatever you're eating or ordering an appetizer for them to try.

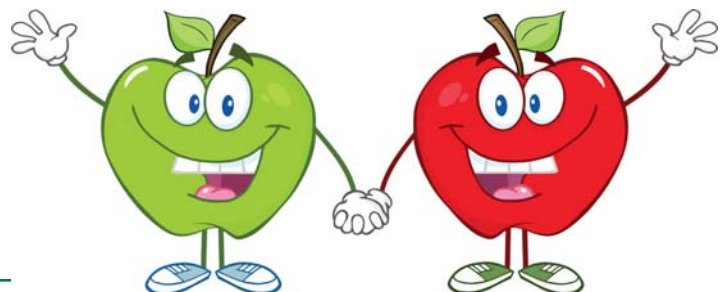
***Drink calories count.** Soda and other sweetened drinks add extra calories and get in the way of good nutrition. Water and milk are the best drinks for kids. Juice is fine when it's 100% but kids don't need much of it...4-6 ounces a day is enough for preschoolers.

***Put sweets in their place.** Occasional sweets are fine but don't turn dessert into the main reason for eating. When dessert is the prize for eating lunch or dinner, kids naturally place more value on the cupcake than the broccoli. Try to stay neutral about foods.

***Food is not love.** Find better ways to say "I love you." When foods are used to reward kids and show affection, they may start using food to cope with stress or other emotions. Offer hugs, encouragement and attention instead of food treats.

***Kids do as you do.** Be a role model and eat healthy yourself. When trying to teach good eating habits, try to set the best example possible. Choose nutritious snacks, eat at the table and don't skip meals.

***Limit TV and computer time.** When you do, you'll avoid mindless snacking and encourage activity. Research shows that kids who cut down on TV watching also reduce their percentage of body fat. When TV and computer time are limited, they'll find more active things to do. And limiting screen time means you'll have more time to be active together.



Reviewed by Mary L. Gavin, MD, September 2015, <http://kidshealth.org>

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The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is a unique education agency with a statewide network of professional educators, trained volunteers, and county offices. It reaches into every Texas county to address local priority needs. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension offers practical information for families: raising children, housing and environment, eating well, managing money, and staying healthy.

Mark Your Calendars

Saturday, June 25, 2016
9 am to 3:30 pm

Inclusive Child Care for Preschool and School Age Children.
Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center at Dallas

Registration fee: \$30.00 which includes snacks, lunch, and 6 clock hours/CEUs OR
\$25 which includes snacks and clock hours/CEUs (please bring your lunch).



Cooking with Kids: Broccoli Nuggets

This may become your child's favorite way to eat broccoli since these nuggets have a satisfying crunch. Little hands are perfect for shaping the nuggets.

2 cups packed fresh broccoli, finely chopped
1 cup water
3 eggs, whisked
¼ cup reduced fat shredded cheddar cheese
1 cup panko bread crumbs
½ teaspoon dried oregano
¼ teaspoon garlic powder
¼ teaspoon salt

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Place broccoli and water in a microwave safe bowl. Microwave 2 ½ minutes. Broccoli should be tender but not mushy. Depending on the wattage of the microwave, cooking time may need to be increased by 30 seconds to 1 minute.

Once broccoli is cooked, remove and drain well. Place chopped broccoli in a large bowl and add in the whisked eggs, cheese, bread crumbs, oregano, garlic powder and salt. Use a wooden spoon or your hands to combine well. Mixture should stick together without much effort.

Shape into nuggets and place on a baking sheet that has been sprayed with cooking spray. If you having a hard time forming nuggets, add more breadcrumbs, one tablespoon at a time.

Bake for 15 minutes. Flip once and bake for an additional 10 minutes. Serve as is or with your favorite dip. Serves 4 (6 nuggets per serving). Per serving: 203 calories, 9 g fat, 151 cholesterol, 508 mg sodium, 17 g carbohydrates, 2 g fiber, 14 g protein.

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