

Spar Lancashire School Games

Early Years

Why Physical Activity and Movement Is Important for Your Child

Physical Activity: The Evidence

- Children under five who can walk should be physically active for 180 minutes (3 hours) a day, including all activity intensities from light through to vigorous activity. This is the recommendation from the Chief Medical Officer for Public Health England.
- Only 9% of children aged 2-4 years in England meet the physical activity recommendations and 84% participate in less than 1 hour per day.
- Physical activity may be beneficial for cardiovascular disease risk factors, weight status, fundamental motor skills, psychosocial wellbeing, cognitive development and school readiness.
- Physical activity and sedentary behaviour patterns persist at a moderate level during early childhood and throughout the transition phase from early childhood to middle childhood.
- Children are more active if their parents/carers are active.

In 2011, the Chief Medical Officer published physical activity and sedentary behaviour guidelines. For the first time specific guidelines were included for children under five. These guidelines state:

1. Physical activity should be encouraged from birth, particularly through floor-based play (sometimes referred to a 'tummy time') and water-based activities in safe environments.
2. Children of pre-school age who are capable of walking unaided should be physically active daily for at least 180 minutes (3 hours) spread throughout the day.
3. All under-fives should minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary (being restrained or sitting) for extended periods (except time spent sleeping).

Why? Benefits:

Fundamental motor and movement skills: Physical activity is positively associated with fundamental motor skills, all of which influence physical, social and cognitive development. Specifically, physical activity is associated with balance, locomotor skills and/or manipulative skills, e.g. holding a pencil. Crawling strengthens the shoulders, arms, and core that allow a child to sit up and to write. This could be incorporated into games and activities for older children who are walking. These skills are the building blocks for all the future movements required to be involved in ANY sport and even for everyday life.

Importance of physical activity for under-fives Cognitive development: In older children, the link between physical activity and improved cognitive development and academic

achievement is well established. During the first years of life, the brain undergoes a rapid period of development and it is likely that physical activity plays a key role. Emerging evidence from studies in the early years have linked physical activity with improved language, attention and self-regulation.

Psychosocial wellbeing: Physical activity in the early years may be beneficially associated with self-concept, self-esteem, behaviour and emotional and social competence. Further, being physically active and able, will allow the child to play and not be left behind by their friends.

School readiness: As discussed above there is emerging evidence to suggest that physical activity is beneficial for cognitive, social and emotional development as well as fine motor skills which are vital for school e.g. holding a pencil, or even special awareness and balance.

What Kind of Activity?

Babies: Should be encouraged to be active throughout the day, every day in a variety of ways, including crawling.

If they're not yet crawling, encourage them to be physically active by reaching and grasping, pulling and pushing, moving their head, body and limbs during daily routines, and during supervised floor play.

Try to include at least 30 minutes of tummy time spread throughout the day when they are awake

Toddlers: Active play, such as using a climbing frame, riding a bike, playing in water, chasing games and ball games, is the best way for this age group to get moving.

Pre-schoolers and reception children: should spend at least 180 minutes (3 hours) a day doing a variety of physical activities spread throughout the day, learning through play is a great concept! This should include active and outdoor play.



Information taken from 'Physical Activity in the Early Years: A Briefing Paper' (2015). National Centre for Physical Activity and Health.

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-children-under-five-years/>