

The Bronx Health Link

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JUNE 2006

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Facts Every Mother Should Know About Kids and Obesity
- Tips to Get Active
- Why Play is So Important for Kids
- Why Should I Be Active?

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Physical Activity for Everyone

It is recommended that children and adolescents participate in at least 60 min. of moderate physical activity most days of the week, preferably daily. Children and adolescents can choose any type of physical activity, like brisk walking, playing tag, jumping rope, or swimming, as long as it adds up to at least 1 hour a day.

For children and adolescents, regular physical activity has beneficial effects on:

- ✓ Weight
- ✓ Muscular strength
- ✓ Cardio-respiratory fitness
- ✓ Bone mass (through weight-bearing physical activities)
- ✓ Anxiety and stress
- ✓ Self-esteem

Children and adolescents who are just beginning to be physically active should start out slowly and gradually build to higher



levels in order to prevent the risk of injury or feel defeated from unrealistic goals. It is im-

portant that children and adolescents are encouraged to be physically active by doing things that interest them. This will help them establish an active lifestyle early on.

Tips for Parents

As a parent, you have an important role in shaping your children's physical activity attitudes and behaviors. Here are some tips to encourage your children to be more physically active:

- Set a positive example by leading an active lifestyle yourself, and make physical activity part of your family's daily routine, such as designating time for family walks or playing active games together.

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Facts Every Mother Should Know

- For the 1st time in a century, American kids face a shorter life expectancy than their parents.
- One in every three kids in the U.S. has a weight problem.
- Eleven percent of American children and adolescents are obese.
- In the past three decades, the number of overweight children

has more than doubled, with most of the increases occurring during the past ten years.



- Approximately a third of obese preschoolers and half of obese school-aged children will remain obese as adults.
- By adolescence, overweight kids have a 70 to 80 percent chance of carrying their extra weight into adulthood.
- Sodas are sold in at least 60

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Children and the Importance of Playing

People love to play, when given the chance. There is a reason for that... it's because play is important. Engaging in play behavior is very liberating. It enables us to be self-expressive in ways that are removed from our actual daily self. Play allows us to try new things without the pressure to succeed. It frees us to be something we are not, even if only for a moment.

Children need play in their daily lives so they can learn of the bigger world from a safe vantage point. Within free-play, they learn to better express their views and understand themselves in relation to the world. Play's therapeutic value: allows a child to safely open up a closed door that is too harsh to view without a safety net. When given the chance to talk through a puppet or draw out a feeling with crayons and paper, a great deal can be learned about the child and his fears and problems.

There are many types of play, but for the most part they can be split into two categories: *structured* and *unstructured* play. When children are involved with organized sports, such as soccer or softball, this is structured play. So are playing board and card games. Rules are put into place in order to govern the choices of the players and identify courses of acceptable action.

Unstructured play is less specific in its goals or objectives. Children engage in free play that flows from point to point without set rules or expectations. For instance, five children might want to play "house" in the dress-up corner at school and there might be three mommies, one child and a dog. Everyone gets to contribute to the general idea without one child in complete control. In this type of play, there are often unexpected twists and turns that can keep the game going for a long period of time.

Unstructured play goes hand-in-hand with heightened imagination. When paired together, unparalleled creativity is unleashed and in this context, a child can travel anywhere she can envision, or he can try out any role he wants. By touching this creative side, the child is able to learn of the self, of what he is good at and what he dreams to be good at. This can only be accomplished if the child is afforded ample time and freedom to explore and discover his/her interests, skills and talents. Unstructured play allows for maximum exploration. This should be a given in childhood; however, it frequently is NOT.

The Value of Child-Initiated Play

When given the chance to play quietly by themselves, children can easily become engrossed in highly imaginative play and can occupy themselves for extended periods - that is, if they are used to having time to play and time to be alone. Parents often say that their children claim to be bored when they are asked to play quietly or on their own. Although the child may swear to it as fact, boredom is not likely the case... he just needs some adult direction.

When they ask for direction, make suggestions but try not to give orders. Half the fun of creating a game is in the process of discovering it for oneself. Many children have, unfortunately, lost this ability due to the intrusion of highly structured activity and the media. Regaining the freedom to think and act for themselves will restore childhood to children.

Structured Activity

Children who routinely have their time filled for them often have difficulty filling it for themselves when asked to. Today, it seems that every

available moment of free time is filled with some type of organized activity or sport. Children move from their regular school day program to ice skating, French class, soccer and ballet, all before dinner-time. They are learning how to be "schedule-juggling" adults at an early age.

Most parents believe that by giving their children these extra-curricular classes, they are providing an edge for success. Actually, what may be happening is that they may be robbing them of their personal creativity and imagination.

Free time allows for open-ended play, either while alone or with others. Play dates that are left unstructured frequently allow for free flowing communication, the opportunity to learn "give and take" when with others, and the chance to create a play scenario that is unique to the two or three children involved in creating it.

The Media

If you can stand it, sit and watch a TV or cable program with your child. During the half-hour time frame, you are bombarded with dozens of messages -- from what to buy, what to eat and how to play with the toys that are directly derived from the program. If you look at the subtle messages, the story is made to be a script for later play. Usually, there's a set story line -- the characters are given a task, they try to do it, get into some problems, which they solve, and then they get some reward. It is a formula that is proven and repeated in many different programs.

Children are like sponges. They absorb what they see. Given this message, they will automatically use this story line when they play.

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**"Do it,
move it,
make it
happen.
No one
ever sat
their way
to
success."
—Unknown**

Why should I be active?



“Our minds
need
relaxation and
will give way,
unless we mix
with work a
little play.”
—Moliere.

**“It’s easier to maintain
your health than regain it.”
– Dr. Ken Cooper**

Physical activity can bring you many health benefits. People who enjoy participating in moderate-intensity or vigorous-intensity physical activity on a regular basis benefit by lowering their risk of developing coronary heart disease, stroke, non-insulin-dependent (type 2) diabetes mellitus, high blood pressure, and colon cancer by 30–50% (U.S. Dept. of Health, 1996). Additionally, active people have lower premature death rates than people who are the least active.

Regular physical activity can improve health and reduce the risk of premature death in the following ways:

- Reduces the risk of developing coronary heart disease (CHD) and the risk of dying from CHD
- Reduces the risk of stroke
- Reduces the risk of having a

second heart attack in people who have already had one heart attack

- Lowers both total blood cholesterol and triglycerides and increases high-density lipoproteins (HDL or the “good” cholesterol)
- Lowers the risk of developing high blood pressure
- Helps reduce blood pressure in people who already have hypertension
- Lowers the risk of developing non-insulin-dependent (type 2) diabetes mellitus
- Reduces the risk of developing colon cancer
- Helps people achieve and maintain a healthy body weight
- Reduces feelings of depression and anxiety
- Promotes psychological well-being and reduces feelings of stress
- Helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints

- Helps older adults become stronger and better able to move about without falling or becoming excessively fatigued.

Can a lack of physical activity hurt your health?

Evidence shows that those who are not physically active are definitely not helping their health, and may likely be hurting it. The closer we look at the health risks associated with a lack of physical activity, the more convincing it is that Americans who are not yet regularly physically active should become active.

Content source: Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

Information compiled from:
Center for Disease Control (CDC),
<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/index.htm>

The Importance of Playing

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Sometimes, children are so dependent on the media’s direction that they feel they NEED to have the exact character toys to play a game. Parents are then pressured into buying those toys. Then, the children just copy the show they watched, making the play not free or unstructured, but highly structured and scripted. In this

content the media has the supreme role in directing behavior.

Smart parents know that this heavy media presence can lead to arguments and the child’s learning things against a family’s own belief system. These parents recognize a child’s natural curiosity and encourage it to grow and flourish in new ways. They know children love to be free to try new things. In fact,

when given the chance, some can sit for hours and watch ants crawl back and forth across the ground, or watch tadpoles swim in the creek. Sometimes, this open-ended discovery can yield great imaginative play.

Giving our children the chance to explore and discover themselves in free-play is one of the greatest gifts we can give them.



Tips for Being More Active



**You can't
change where
you came
from. You can
change where
you are
going."
—Anonymous**

Just knowing that physical activity is good for us doesn't mean that we'll easily be able to make it part of our daily routines—it's sometimes difficult to adopt new habits. But it's important to remember that you can start out slowly and work your way up to a higher level of activity.

There are 1,440 minutes in every day... Schedule 30 of them for physical activity.

Adults need recess too! With a little creativity and planning, even the person with the busiest schedule can make room for physical activity. For many folks, before or after work or meals is often an available time to cycle, walk, or play. Think about your weekly or daily schedule and look for or make opportunities to be more active. Every little bit helps.

Consider these suggestions:

- Walk, cycle, jog, skate, etc., to work, school, the store.
- Park the car farther away from your destination.

- Get on or off the bus several blocks away.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator.
- Play with children or pets.
- Take fitness breaks instead of cigarette/coffee breaks.
- Perform gardening or home repair activities.
- Avoid labor-saving devices—turn off the self-propel option on your lawn mower or vacuum cleaner.
- Use leg power—take small trips on foot to get your body moving.
- Exercise while watching TV
- Dance to music.
- Keep a pair of comfortable walking or running shoes in your car and office. You'll be ready for activity wherever you go!
- Make a Saturday morning walk a group habit.
- Walk while doing errands.
- Use a sensible approach by starting out slowly.
- Begin by choosing moderate activities you enjoy. By choosing activities you enjoy, you'll more likely stick with them.
- Gradually build up the time spent doing the activity by adding a few min. every few days until you can comfortably perform the recommended amount (30 minutes per day).
- As the minimum amount becomes easier, gradually increase either the length of time performing an activity or increase the intensity of the activity, or both.
- Vary your activities, both for interest and to broaden the range of benefits.
- Explore new activities.
- Reward and acknowledge your efforts.

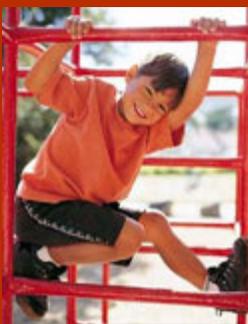
Information compiled from:
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Tips for People Who Have Been Inactive for a While

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- Provide opportunities for children to be active by playing with them. Give them active toys and equipment, and take them to places where they can be active.
- Offer positive reinforcement for the physical activities in which your child participates and encourage them as they express interest in new activities.
- Make physical activity fun. Fun activities can be anything the child enjoys, structured or non-structured. They may include team sports, individual sports, walking, running, skating, bicycling, or free time.
- Ensure that the activity is age-appropriate and, to ensure safety, provide protective equipment such as helmets, wrist pads, and knee pads.
- Find a convenient place to be active regularly.
- Limit the time your children watch television or play video games to no more than two hours per day. Instead, encourage your children to find fun activities to do with family members or on their own that simply involve more activity (walking, playing chase, dancing).

Information compiled from:
Centers for Disease Control (CDC), <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/index.htm>



THE BRONX HEALTH LINK, INC.



Our Mission

The Bronx Health Link, Inc. (TBHL) is a Bronx-wide network of diverse service providers, organizations, coalitions, agencies, community stakeholders, residents, and students. We serve the Bronx and NYC in various ways, including as a clearinghouse for information and referral, providing technical assistance as needed, and broadcasting information through the TBHL Email Communication Network, which has over

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500 subscribers. The daily E-Comm provides e-mail messages on a wide scope of information, including grant and job opportunities (Mon.), public health and medical access news (Tues.), community and provider events and resources (Wed.), medical research and safety alerts (Thurs.), and news on maternal, infant, child, adolescent, and women's reproductive health research, news, and resources (Fri.).

Our mission is to improve community health by:

- identifying emerging community health issues;
- increasing communication to better serve the community;
- providing information to providers and community residents on services and resources; and
- increasing access to available services and programs.

Facts Every Mother Should Know

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percent of all public and private middle schools and high schools nationwide.

- School kids who regularly consume soft drinks take in approximately 200 more calories each day than their classmates who abstain. A daily excess intake of 100 calories a day can easily lead to a 10-pound weight gain in just a year.
- Thirty-four percent of American kids ages two to five drink sodas regularly.
- The average American gets 27 percent of total daily energy from junk foods, and nearly a third of Americans consume half of their daily calories in the form of these non-nutritious foods.
- Incredibly, only 1 percent of U.S. children and adolescents currently consume a diet that meets the recommendations of the Food Guide Pyramid.
- Nearly 60% of overweight kids between the ages of 5-10 already have at least one risk factor for heart disease.
- 1 out of every 4 obese American child is showing early signs of Type II diabetes, a 50 percent rise in the last ten years.
- Approximately 30 % of obese American children have asthma, compared with 5-12% of the general population.
- Children with one obese parent have a 40 percent chance of becoming overweight or obese themselves.
- Skipping breakfast is strongly linked to developing obesity — 1/3 of American kids and adults skip breakfast regularly.
- Fewer than half of American students are currently enrolled in physical education classes.

Information taken from: <http://www.rallieonhealth.com/facts.php>