

Ask an Expert

How much physical activity do kids need?

Two published reports have just emphasized that children and adolescents should participate in one hour or more of physical activity per day. The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have just published fact sheets regarding research in health promotion, which found that our children are not as active as they should be.

HHS has just published the first ever Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. In that document, the researchers note that physical activity is beneficial for all age, ethnic and racial groups, and they suggested amounts necessary for improving health and reducing the risk of disease. This document suggests that children and adolescents should participate in:

- One hour or more of physical activity per day, and most of the activity should be moderate or vigorous aerobic physical activity
- Vigorous physical activity at least three days a week
- Muscle-strengthening activities, such as push-ups and sit-ups and playing tug-of-war, three days a week and incorporate bone-strengthening activities, such as jumping rope, hopping or running, at least three days a week



NASPE agrees with this statement, as well as referencing a 2003 NASPE publication titled Physical Activity for Children: A Statement of Guidelines for Children Ages 5-12. Summary guidelines from this publication state:

- Children should accumulate at least 60 minutes and up to several hours of age-appropriate physical activity on all or most days of the week.
- Children should participate in several bouts of physical activity lasting 15 minutes or more each day.
- Children should participate each day in a variety of age-appropriate physical activities designed to achieve optimal health, wellness, fitness and performance benefits.
- Extended periods (periods of two hours or more) of inactivity are discouraged for children, especially during the daytime hours.

For additional information, visit the following Web sites:

- NASPE – Physical Activity for Children:
www.aahperd.org/naspe/template.cfm?template=pr_123103.html
- HHS – Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans:
www.health.gov/paguidelines.

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My kids are in lots of sports. Do we have anything we can do to help prevent injuries?

Kids play sports and are physically active primarily because it is fun. They have fun with their friends and meet new ones, they learn new skills and master current ones, and they like to win and have that feeling of being successful. Being active in a variety of sports helps the child be versatile in a variety of skills and prevents burnout.

A risk of injury comes with any type of physical activity. Injuries can vary from mild to moderate to severe, depending on the sport or activity and how the injury occurred. Nonetheless, preventing all injuries from taking place is impossible. Therefore, being aware of prevention techniques can aid in decreasing the chance of an injury occurring.

Having coaches, teachers and parents who are properly trained in first aid/CPR is imperative. No matter what the injury might be, this basic training can help the lay person learn basic skills to assist in recognizing and caring for an injury. Consulting a physician if you have questions or concerns about any type of injury always is important, too. If a serious injury has taken place, following return-to-play criteria established by a physician is vital.

Other important prevention techniques:

- Do pre-participation screening prior to start of sport season (yearly)
- Stretch and/or warm up body prior to activity or sport
- Use proper techniques
- Wear equipment that fits properly, including shoes that fit correctly
- Drink water as needed to stay hydrated, especially during warmer weather
- Give adequate rest breaks for the body to recover
- Follow the rules of the game

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Should shoes be passed down from one sibling to the next?

The answer to this question depends on what the shoes are going to be used for, such as general use or more specific athletic/sport activities. If your child or adolescent is just going to use the shoes for general use, such as everyday activities, playing in the yard, etc, then passing shoes down is not a problem as long as the sibling who will receive the shoes has similar-sized feet and the shoes are not too worn out. If the shoes have holes or are coming apart, a new pair is necessary.

However, if the shoes are going to be used for athletic or sport activities, especially activities that involve a lot of running on hard surfaces, you need to be more careful when passing down shoes. There are a couple of reasons why this is true. The first is that shoes tend to lose their cushioning ability. After about 300 to 500 miles of wear, a pair of shoes will lose their cushioning ability due to the use they have been put through. Even if they have not been worn for several hundred miles, the shoes still will lose some of their cushioning ability due to the aging of the materials in the shoe. As the materials age, they lose the ability to cushion the feet properly.

Another possible reason to avoid passing shoes down for sport-related activities is that having shoes that fit properly and are designed to match the gait pattern of the foot is more important. The majority of people have a normal gait pattern. However, some people have "flat feet," which means they have little or no arch. When looking for running shoes, remember that runners who have "flat" feet need shoes that are designed with motion control features and a straight last. Some people have "high arches" and walk or run mainly on the outside edge of their feet. The people with these types of foot patterns need running shoes designed with a curved last and extra cushioning.

You may have a child or adolescent with shoes designed for flat feet, but the sibling to receive the shoes has high arches or vice versa. In that case, the shoes should not be used by the second sibling. The shoes probably will not be comfortable to the second sibling receiving the shoes and that sibling is more likely to have overuse injuries to the feet, knees and possibly hips.

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