

**OrthoInfo**

STAYING HEALTHY

Fitness for Kids

Fitness levels among kids are on the decline. Only one in four American schoolchildren gets an adequate amount of physical activity each day and the number of overweight children is growing rapidly.

Children should get at least 35 to 60 minutes of exercise each day. Without it, they can miss their chance to build the strong bones they will need later in life.

Bones grow in size and strength during childhood. The bone mass gained through physical activity during childhood helps determine how healthy bones will be throughout life.

Physical Activity Is Important

If you want strong bones, you have to use them. Like muscle, bone is living tissue that responds to exercise by becoming stronger.

Weight-Bearing Activity

During physical activity, bones and muscles work against gravity. This occurs with any type of weight-bearing exercise, including walking, jogging, dancing, and team sports like basketball and soccer. These activities cause bones to build more cells and become stronger. Everyone needs weight-bearing exercise throughout their whole life.

Cardiovascular Activity

In addition to building stronger bones, regular physical activity also strengthens the heart and lungs. It lowers blood pressure, improves muscle strength and flexibility, reduces stress and depression, helps control weight, and improves sleep.



By limiting your time in front of a computer or television, you may find that you naturally become more physically active.

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A Healthy Diet Is Important

Childhood is a critical time for developing dietary habits that support bone health. Calcium is an important ingredient in healthy bones. Osteoporosis is a disease that can develop later in life as a result of not getting enough calcium during the growing years.

Young people can help avoid osteoporosis by putting "deposits" of at least 1,300 mg of calcium each day into their "bone banks." Calcium comes in dairy foods. These include milk; yogurt and cheese; and green, leafy vegetables, like spinach and broccoli.

Getting Started

Getting started is the toughest step in any exercise program — but it is the most important step. Slow and steady is the best way to begin to improve general fitness.

- Start with a variety of physical activities.
- Choose fun activities throughout the year.
- Take plenty of time to get ready. Warming up before exercise gets your body ready to be active. Do walking, bending, and gentle stretching exercises. Flexibility exercises will help avoid injuries. Here are some simple stretching exercises that can be used to warm up:

[Flexibility Exercises for Young Athletes](#)

(/en/staying-healthy/flexibility-exercises-for-young-athletes/).

- Sure and steady. Work toward fitness goals gradually.

Tips for Kids

- Plan to be active for at least 35 minutes each day. This can be broken up into shorter periods. Try 15 minutes of walking and 20 minutes of sports.
- Keep a daily activity log of minutes spent on activity. To build strength in legs, hips and the lower spine, try brisk walking, jogging, or hiking.
- Exercise can be fun. Try sports (like soccer, baseball, and basketball), dancing, step aerobics, stair climbing, tennis and other racquet sports, skiing, skating, karate, or bowling.

Tips for Parents

- Exercise can be fun! Put the emphasis on fun rather than on winning.
- Be a role model. Join children for a bike ride, a ball game, or a long walk.
- Use physical activity as a reward. Plan a family trip to the park.
- Make exercise part of everyone's daily routine. Chores such as raking leaves, painting, or walking the dog are great ways to increase physical activity.
- Schedule physical activity. Think about planning activities in 10- to 15-minute blocks of time throughout the day.
- Make it easy to be active. Plan indoor areas for physical activity.
- Make it fun to be active. Select toys and gifts that promote physical activity.



Reviewed by members of

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The Pediatric Orthopaedic Society of North America (POSNA) is a group of board eligible/board certified orthopaedic surgeons who have specialized training in the care of children's musculoskeletal health.

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