

Physical activity for older children and teenagers

Young people have lots of demands on their time, so they can find it hard to be active. But physical activity keeps teenage bodies and minds fit and healthy – and during adolescence, your child needs at least 60 minutes of activity every day.

Why physical activity is important for pre-teen and teenage children

Being active is an important part of your child's daily routine. It's a great way to spend time with friends, meet new people, feel good and break up long stretches of sitting and studying.

Being active every day can help:

- improve heart health and fitness
- develop strong muscles, bones and good posture
- maintain a healthy weight
- improve concentration and memory
- learn new skills
- increase self-confidence
- reduce stress
- make and keep friendships
- improve sleep.

Not getting enough physical activity can put your child at risk of [overweight and obesity](#), high blood pressure, [anxiety](#), [depression](#) and [type-2 diabetes](#).

Best kinds of physical activity

Physical activity done at a moderate or vigorous level is good for your child's health.

Moderate activities generally make your child 'huff and puff' a little bit. These could include brisk walking, dancing, bike riding, swimming laps of a pool and jogging. Even helping out with some of the more active chores inside and outside your home can be good.

Vigorous activities increase your child's heart rate and make him 'huff and puff' even more. Vigorous activities can happen in any game with lots of running – for example, formal activities like basketball, or less formal activities like chasey. They can also be running or jogging, or sports like soccer, hockey, swimming and football.

Your child can get 'huffing and puffing' in lots of different ways – anything from organised sport to active transport and unplanned activities will do!

Getting enough physical activity

Australian guidelines recommend children aged 5-18 years have **at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day**. For many young people, this physical activity doesn't just happen – it needs to be planned.

When you and your child think about how to get enough physical activity into her daily schedule, the following points might help:

- Where can your child be active? How much space do you have at home, in the backyard, at the local park, walking track or local pool?
- What local options are low cost or free to use?
- Who are your child's 'active' friends? Who can you visit to help your child be active?
- Who else can help your child be active when you don't have time to help?
- Are there any young people's groups that could be useful?

- What activities can your family plan so you can all be active together?

Your child doesn't have to get his daily 60 minutes of physical activity in one hit. He can **build it up over the day** through a range of different activities. This makes it easier to get enough and to do even more than 60 minutes.

School sport isn't always enough

You might think your child will get all the physical activity she needs in physical education (PE) classes or from running around at lunchtime. Unfortunately, this might not happen.

In PE classes, students spend only about one-third of their time being moderately to vigorously active – the rest of the time is spent learning about sports, skills, safety, exercise and the human body. And in their lunch break, children and teenagers can often be busy socialising, eating and doing other slow-paced things.

In one Australian study, fewer than half the students were found to be moderately to vigorously active at lunchtime. The physical activity your child gets at school probably isn't going to be enough.

Children who don't like physical activity

Not all young people are keen on physical activity. If this sounds like your child, you can give him lots of **praise and encouragement** when he does get active.

There are also a few other things you could try:

- Make a list of activities your child could try. You might need to explore a range of different organised and recreational activities to find one your child likes. Include activities that your child can do close to home and for low or no cost – for example, walking to the shops or going for a bike ride.
- Look for simple, non-competitive activities that allow your child to

socialise in a positive way. These can help her feel good about having a go, rather than feeling pressure to be the best.

- Think about activities and groups like community youth clubs, Scouts and Girl Guides. These groups often do lots of physical activities. When young people get involved in groups like these, they might also feel a sense of achievement, which makes it more likely that they'll have another go.
- If your child has been put off physical activity by a bad experience in the past, help him practise his skills and build confidence. For example, you could have a game of tennis with him at a local court. When there are no other kids around, your child might be more likely to have a go. And the bonus is you get to spend some time having fun together.
- Your child doesn't have to play a sport to be involved in sport. She could look for opportunities to take part in physical activity by umpiring, volunteering to support teams or coaching younger children.

When you're active yourself, you give your child a great role model for physical activity. If you can get him to be active with you, he'll get a chance to see how good it can feel.

Balancing physical activity with screen time

One reason why young people aren't getting enough active, outdoor time is because **they're spending a lot of time sitting in front of screens** doing things like watching TV, using [social media](#), browsing the internet, playing video games, texting on mobiles and so on.

For children aged six years and older and teenagers, the most recent [screen time](#) guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) say that there should be **consistent limits on the time they spend on electronic media and the types of media they use**. It's also important to make sure that screen time doesn't take the place of sleep and activities like physical play, reading, creative play like drawing, and social time with family

and friends.

Setting limits on screen time

If you want to set some limits on your child's screen time, you can start by thinking about how much screen time your child has every day. If it's more than you'd like, you could agree on a **daily schedule** for physical activity and electronic media use.

Another good way to cut down on screen time is to have all your screens – TV, computer, mobile phones – in your home's family areas, rather than the bedrooms.

And when you're setting limits, these **limits should apply to everyone** in your home – including you. You might find that limits on the use of mobile phones and other screens can help clear time for family activities.

Screen time is an OK way to spend a small part of each day, but other things are better for your child's overall development. These things include physical activity, homework, reading and time with family and friends.

Balancing physical activity with homework

You might be worried that homework is limiting your child's physical activity. If so, try talking to teachers about how much [homework](#) your child is supposed to be doing, then look at how much she's actually doing.

If you think the impact of homework is too big, you might like to talk to the teacher to work out a compromise.

Physical activity and young people with additional needs

Physical activity is just as important for children with additional needs, even if they have extra challenges. Many organised activities have been modified or are supported to help these children have a go. Check with support groups or sporting organisations to see what's available in your area.

Your family could also try making time to do physically active things together to fit in with your child's needs.

Outdoor physical activity is especially important for young people with additional needs. Being outdoors is a good way for young people to get the [vitamin D](#) needed for strong bones and muscles.

Video keeping teenagers fit and active

Download video

24mb

In this short video, parents and teenagers talk about the importance of a fit and healthy lifestyle. As one dad says, 'When my daughter does exert herself, she feels happier and healthier'. The video includes lots of everyday ideas about the ways these families fit physical activity and fitness into their busy lives. Many of them choose activities they can all do together.