



# Mealtime Memo

## for Child Care

### Physical Activity for Young Children

Physical activity is any movement of the body that requires it to use more energy than it would in a resting state. This includes walking, walking briskly, running, dancing, swimming, gardening, and more. There are many physical benefits for children when active play exercise is incorporated into their daily life. All movement uses energy; however, for the movement to count as exercise, it should be moderate or vigorous. Incorporating active play in your child care facility provides a jump start for children learning and wanting to move or exercise.



Why incorporate active play? Moderate to vigorous levels of physical activity, also called active play, helps children to exercise their heart, lungs, and legs; maintain a healthy weight; learn better; develop motor skills, such as running or skipping; and be less likely to develop chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes.

Preschoolers may not be as active as we may think. Without having a plan, activity levels within child care centers can be very low, and levels of sedentary behavior may be high. It is important to establish good nutrition and physical activity habits at an early age. Children will be healthier and be more likely to remain healthy as they get older. Staff can also teach children about good nutrition and physical activity as part of the daily learning environment by reading books and having activities centered around healthy foods.

There are best practices regarding the amount of time children should get movement or exercise while in child care. Toddlers (12 months to 3 years old) should have 60 to 90 minutes per 8-hour day of moderate to vigorous physical activity. Preschoolers (3 to 6 years old) should have 90 to 120 minutes per 8-hour day, including children with special needs. You can also think of it as having 12 to 15 minutes or more of moderate and vigorous physical activity per hour for an 8-hour day. Physical activity is necessary for all individuals which includes children with special needs. Include exercise that is structured active play (teacher-led) and unstructured play (free play).



## Physical Activity Guidelines

According to SHAPE America (Society of Health and Physical Educators) *Active Start: A Statement of Physical Activity Guidelines for Children From Birth to Age 5*, 2nd Edition, the guidelines for activities are arranged in age groups: infants (birth to age 12 months), toddlers (age 12 months to 36 months), and preschoolers (age 3-5) years. Please see the listed guidelines.

### Guidelines for Infants

- Infants should interact with caregivers in daily physical activities that are dedicated to exploring movement and the environment.
- Caregivers should place infants in settings that encourage and stimulate movement experiences and active play for short periods of time several times a day.

### Guidelines for Toddlers

- Toddlers should engage in a total of at least 30 minutes of structured physical activity each day.
- Toddlers should engage in at least 60 minutes—and up to several hours per day of unstructured physical activity and should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time, except when sleeping.

### Guidelines for Preschoolers

- Preschoolers should accumulate at least 60 minutes of structured physical activity each day.
- Preschoolers should engage in at least 60 minutes—and up to several hours—of unstructured physical activity each day and should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time, except when sleeping.



According to *Caring for Our Children*, young children ages 2 to 5 should play actively several times per day. Physical activity should be developmentally appropriate, and it should offer variety and fun. For monthly and daily activities for children for physical education recreation and dance see: <http://www.healthychildcare.org/PDF/LetsMove%20CalendarENGLCalendarFULL.pdf>

## References

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