

## **New Physical Activity Guidelines for Children**

Live Light Live Right Blog article

by

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The benefits of regular physical activity are indisputable in all age groups, as it keeps us healthy and fit. In particular, active children have higher levels of cardiorespiratory fitness, stronger muscles and bones, and lower body fat than inactive children. Being involved in physical activity from a young age is associated with decreased long-term morbidity and all-cause mortality as an adult. Active children usually do not develop chronic diseases such as heart disease or type 2 diabetes. Although obesity and high blood pressure, risk factors for these diseases, are becoming increasingly apparent in children, the chances of developing these risk factors are lowered with regular physical activity. This article will summarize the new guidelines published by the U.S Department of Health and Human Services in 2018 for physical activity in children (the link to the full report can be found at the bottom).

The new key guidelines for individuals ages 6 to 17 are to participate in physical activity for at least 60 minutes every day. There are three general types of physical activity-- aerobic, muscle-strengthening, and bone-strengthening. More information about each type and examples are below. It is recommended for children that the majority of exercise performed every day is aerobic, with muscle-strengthening and bone-strengthening performed at least three days per week.

The three types of physical activity are:

1. Aerobic activities- those in which large muscles are rhythmically moved for a sustained period of time, which increases cardiorespiratory fitness in children. Examples include running, skipping, jumping rope, swimming, dancing, and biking.
2. Muscle-strengthening activities- those in which muscles do more work than they usually do in daily life activities. These activities can be structured (lifting weights or using resistance bands when exercising) or unstructured (playing on playground equipment, climbing trees, or playing tug-of-war).

3. Bone-strengthening activities- those in which a force, usually produced from impact with the ground, is applied on bones. This promotes bone growth and strength in children. These activities can be aerobic or muscle-strengthening activities, as examples include running, jumping rope, and playing basketball or tennis.

It is important to note that age and gender can play a role in determining appropriate physical activities. As children become adolescents, the types of physical activity they may participate in change, such as moving away from playground equipment to sports or weightlifting. Research shows that physical activity levels in adolescent girls generally decrease dramatically compared to adolescent boys. As this is a difference seen even in adulthood, it is important to provide additional support or encouragement to adolescent girls to ensure that the key guidelines for physical activity are met.

Like many other health-related aspects, moderation is key. Children who do not meet the key guidelines for physical activity should take small steps to slowly increase and enjoy physical activity. Children who exceed the key guidelines should vary the activities they participate in to reduce the risk of injury or overtraining. Although children with disabilities are more likely to be inactive than children without, they should consult with healthcare professionals or physical activity specialists to determine which activities and how much is appropriate. Even if they cannot reach the key guidelines for physical activity, they should seek to be as active as possible.

Physical activity should be enjoyable activities for children and not feel forced. One way this can be achieved is by providing children different opportunities for physical activity so that they can find one (or more) that they enjoy. Variety in physical activity is important and so participating in all three types of physical activity (aerobic, muscle-strengthening, and bone-strengthening) is beneficial. The activities should also be appropriate for the child's age. Strong encouragement and support from parents and guardians can help children be more active, stay healthy, and continue with physical activity as they grow up.

Please contact the Live Light Live Right program for more information on how to enroll your child in our program to achieve fitness and improved metabolic health. Call 718-221-1598 or visit our website [livelight.org](http://livelight.org) for more details.

*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2018.*

[https://health.gov/sites/default/files/2019-09/Physical\\_Activity\\_Guidelines\\_2nd\\_edition.pdf](https://health.gov/sites/default/files/2019-09/Physical_Activity_Guidelines_2nd_edition.pdf)



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