

Playing actively makes you happy and healthy!

Active play provides a variety of experiences for young children, and can include anything that encourages and provides children with opportunities for development through movement. It can occur indoors or out, it can be structured or unstructured, it can be with friends, family, child care providers or even alone. When opportunities for active play are provided to children in a safe and supportive environment it **helps them grow!** Opportunities for Active play **make children happy and healthy, are good for their brain and make them strong!**

Children also need opportunities to play actively to **help them learn.** When children are actively playing, their brains get the stimulation needed for healthy development. Active play helps children improve fitness and reduces excess body fat. Lifestyle choices early on, affect children's health and well-being, both now and in the future. An unhealthy diet and sedentary behaviors, are contributing factors to many health problems including becoming overweight or obese. To learn more about healthy living and active play visit the Center for Disease Control (CDC) Website Healthy Living section at: <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyLiving/>

Active play benefits the children – body, mind and soul. When children are offered active playing opportunities versus sedentary opportunities (such as computer and video games) children get the added benefit of being physical which **increases:** aerobic capacity and maintenance of a healthy weight, flexibility, strength and endurance, , and bone mass. Additionally, physical benefits of playing actively also **lowers:** blood pressure, weight and body fat, feelings of anxiety, stress and depression as well as the risk of some cancer and diseases later in life. If that isn't enough, active play keeps your heart healthy and strong, provides social experiences, supports good sleep, and improves academic performance and overall quality of life.

According to the My Pyramid recommendations, children between 2-5 years of age should be encouraged and given the opportunity for active play every day of the week for at least 30-60 minutes a day. Consecutive play is not necessary. Young children play actively in spurts and should be given multiple opportunities throughout the day to engage in both structured and unstructured activities, rather than focusing on one long duration of activity.

Fortunately, many children find playing actively comes naturally, and they readily participate. However, caregivers can broaden children's experiences of playing actively by incorporating a variety of different developmentally and age appropriate, structured and unstructured, as well as indoor and outdoor opportunities to play, learn and grow. To learn more about the great benefits of active play and physical activity visit the My Pyramid website at <http://www.mypyramid.gov/preschoolers/PhysicalActivity/index.html>

Ultimately, exposure, opportunity and communication with children about active play will help children learn to enjoy it. When you offer children opportunities to play actively, you are helping them develop a variety of different skills that will:

- **Give them more positive feelings about themselves.**
 - **Help them develop communication skills.**
 - **Help them learn vocabulary.**
 - **Help them develop skills to follow directions.**
 - **Help them learn about their bodies.**
 - **Help them learn to share, cooperate and take turns.**
 - **Allows children to experience the joys of movement.**
 - **Encourages creativity.**
- Bullet? Help them develop and strengthen their bodies.**