

## Benefits of Active Play for Young Children

### What is Active Play?

Active play is anything that encourages and provides children with opportunities for physical development through movement. It can occur indoors or out, it can be structured or unstructured, it can be with friends, family, care providers or alone.

### Why is active play so important to development?

Physically active play in the early years is a very important part of development that helps young children grow intellectually, emotionally and physically.

When children engage and participate in active play, they are:

1. Developing social competencies
2. Learning about decision making and problem solving
3. Building confidence, self awareness and self esteem
4. Using their imaginations and creativity
5. Improving coordination
6. Working their bodies and
7. Just plain having fun!

### Why is active play so important to health and longevity?

Lifestyle choices made early on, affect health and well-being now, as well as in the future. Poor choices, including an unhealthy diet and sedentary behavior, are contributing factors to many health problems including becoming overweight or obese. Additional health problems associated with being overweight include, but are not limited to, depression, stress, diabetes, heart disease, respiratory problems, high blood pressure, stroke, arthritis, cancer and dying prematurely. Given the vast array of information we now know about these diseases and their connection with being overweight, it is more important than ever to start children off on the best path.

The physical part of active play helps to **increase**:

- Aerobic capacity and maintenance of a healthy weight
- Flexibility
- Strength and endurance
- Bone mass

Active play also **lowers**:

- Blood pressure
- Fat and cholesterol levels in the blood
- Weight and body fat
- Feelings of anxiety, stress and depression
- The risk of some cancer and diseases

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.

### **What are the recommendations for Active Play?**

Like adults, children should be encouraged and be given the opportunity for active play every day of the week for at least 30-60 minutes a day. Children play actively in spurts and should be given multiple opportunities throughout the day to engage in both structured and unstructured activities.

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>

### **How can all children be included in Active Play?**

Opportunities for active play help all children learn and develop, regardless of their abilities. Successful inclusion of children with special needs and disabilities can have its challenges but by adopting an attitude of acceptance all children should be given the opportunity, supported and encouraged to participate in active play at their own level (R. McCall and D. Craft, 2000). There is a wide range in abilities of infants, toddlers and young children so activities should be tailored to the child—concentrating on actions rather than outcomes. Provide young children with a safe, accessible play environment that is age appropriate and supportive to their development.

### **References**

R. McCall and D. Craft. Moving with a purpose: Developing programs for preschoolers of all abilities. 2000

S. Bredekamp. Effective Practices in Early Childhood Education