

# Practical Ideas to Motivate Kids to Exercise

Most parents know that a child's natural inclination is to be active so why is it so hard sometimes to get them motivated to do anything? Why is it that our children are struggling with overweight and obesity issues and a lot of children find it extremely hard to keep up with a physical game or play for any length of time outside with friends?

It's not unreasonable to conclude that sedentary kids are inactive largely because they have picked up behavioural cues from the world around them. Your child will pick up your cues, so be aware of what cues you are sending. In short, make fitness a family affair. Make a conscious effort to be active yourself and thus be a great role model for your children to follow.

Listen to your children - what seems to motivate them, and what seems to turn them off? Ask positive questions after an activity, like, "What did you enjoy most?" and "What did you learn this time?" Always reward the process of sports, physical activity and fitness rather than the final outcome. Remember that not all children want the same thing from sports. One child may want the feeling of being part of a team. Another likes a challenge. A third child may simply enjoy being able to shout a lot - don't forget what it was like to be a kid!

Being in tune with your children will help you find the right activity for your child, and the positive triggers for your child to be motivated and enthusiastic.

The Australian Government has a number of resources and statistical information if you are looking at guidelines and appropriate amount of physical activity your child should do.



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The Department of Health and Aging:

[www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au) talks about benefits to being active and the recommendations for children and adolescence, which some have been listed below.

Did you know that regular physical activity could:

- help prevent heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure?
- reduce the risk of developing type II diabetes and some cancers?
- help build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints reducing the risk of injury?
- promote psychological well-being?

Physical activity recommendations for 5-12 year olds

A combination of moderate and vigorous activities for at least 60 minutes a day is recommended. Examples of moderate activities are a brisk walk, a bike ride or any sort of active play.

More vigorous activities will make kids "huff and puff" and include organised sports such as football and netball, as well as activities such as ballet, running and swimming laps. Children typically accumulate activity in intermittent bursts ranging from a few seconds to several minutes, so any sort of active play will usually include some vigorous activity.

Further information is available on Australia's Physical Activity Recommendations for 5-12 year olds ([www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au))

Physical activity recommendations for 12-18 year olds

At least 60 minutes of physical activity every day is recommended. This can be built up throughout the day with a variety of activities.

Physical activity should be done at moderate to vigorous intensity.

Vigorous activities are those that make you "huff and puff". For additional health benefits, try to include 20 minutes or more of vigorous activity at least three to four days a week.

Further information is available on Australia's Physical Activity Recommendations for 12-18 year olds ([www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au))

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So what can you do at home to motivate your children to be more active?

First, try to incorporate health into all aspects of life, rather than segmenting out "healthy living" into a specific time of day or day of the week. With a little forward thinking it is not difficult to develop deeply cherished family traditions that are active. Try to be active in as many ways as possible. Variety is the important key in providing a range of fun experiences and challenges and provides an opportunity to learn new skills.

By helping your child develop basic skills in a variety of activities, you'll maximise their chances of finding something of interest. Don't limit your ideas to a handful of traditional sports. If your child isn't skilled at throwing a ball, introduce him or her to running, biking, swimming, dancing, or exploring nature, to name just a few. Skills need to be taught and the best way for your child to be interested is for you to be part of that learning process. Children and adolescents love their parents being involved with them. During the years of experience I have teaching children of all ages in skill development and fitness programs, I find they are more motivated and willing to put in more energy and effort when I physically was part of the game or activity. e.g. chasing them or them chasing me, throwing and catching balls with them, picking up a skipping rope and skip with them.

Try bush walking with them on a regular day of the week, and get maps out and plan together different tracks to walk along. Our lives have become extremely busy however if you plan ahead it works.

Think about getting a family dog and make it a family effort to walk the dog and play with the dog. All of these things are classified as vigorous activities.

Invest in a small amount of simple pieces of equipment, setting up an obstacle course or a circuit in your back yard. Encourage your children to rearrange the equipment into a new course so they are proactive in their activity. Try naming these courses backyard boot camp or commando training to give it a feel of adventure to motivate them to use it frequently. If this works then over time increase the equipment to include more climbing equipment or balancing equipment that will keep their interest and enthusiasm.

To help get you started see my 'Backyard Boot Camp' also on fit for life online in March 2009.

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