

Get kids on the go



Keep kids fit the easy way
with an hour's activity every day



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This resource has been adapted by the Irish Heart Foundation
with kind permission from the British Heart Foundation

Why should you encourage your child to be active?

As a parent you want your child to be healthy and happy. Frequent physical activity can help by:

- ♥ improving health – physical activity can help build a healthy heart, develop strong muscles and bones and may help reduce the risk of some chronic diseases that may occur in later life
- ♥ reducing body fat – the number of young people in Ireland who are obese (severely overweight) is increasing and obesity can have a significant effect on health, including the development of diabetes
- ♥ reducing anxiety and stress
- ♥ helping your child feel good about themselves
- ♥ improving social and moral development
- ♥ increasing opportunities for your child to mix with others and make friends

Positive experiences of physical activity in childhood and adolescence will also lay valuable foundations for lifelong participation.

If your child is to enjoy all the benefits of activity, they need to be active at home and during their leisure time as well as at school – most schools do not have time to provide all of the daily activity your child needs.

This is where you can help - read on and find out how.



How much activity should your child do?

To improve health, many international health organisations, the Department of Health & Children and the Irish Heart Foundation recommend that:

“children and young people should aim to participate in activity of at least moderate intensity for one hour every day”

If your child is only taking part in a little activity at the moment, they should build up to this level gradually, starting with an initial target of 30 minutes.

The one hour of activity doesn't all have to be done at once – it can be built up over the day, through for example, four 15 minute periods of activity, three 20 minutes or two 30 minutes. This could include walking to and from school, PE lessons, active play with friends at break times and out of school, sport or structural exercise.

Examples of moderate intensity activities include:

- ♥ brisk walking
- ♥ dance
- ♥ cycling
- ♥ games
- ♥ swimming
- ♥ active play
- ♥ most sports

“at least twice a week, some activities should help to enhance and maintain muscular strength and flexibility and bone health”

It is also recommended that:

For children of primary school age this could include:

- ♥ climbing
- ♥ gymnastics
- ♥ skipping
- ♥ jumping

Is your child doing enough outside school PE lessons?



	YES	NO
Does your child watch less than 3½ hours television each day?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your child walk or cycle to school?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your child play outside most days?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your child take part in organised sport or recreational activities either at school (as part of after-school clubs) or in the local community?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do you take part in activity as a family group (e.g. walking, swimming or playing active games)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

All “YES” answers.

It is likely that your child is already participating in enough activity outside of school. Encourage your child to keep up the good work!

All “NO” answers

Your child is almost certainly not taking part in enough activity outside of school. Don't worry, the rest of this booklet will give you advice on how you can encourage children to do a little more – build up gradually, don't expect them to make big changes overnight!

A mixture of “YES” and “NO” answers.

Your child may not be enjoying all the benefits of an active lifestyle. If children are not participating in 30 minutes or more of activity most days of the week, consider ways in which they could do more – the rest of this book will help.



What can you do to help?

1. Encourage your child to participate in PE lessons

Only write notes for missing PE lessons when this is absolutely necessary due to medical reasons. If your child has specific needs for PE (e.g. if they have asthma) discuss these with their PE teacher – most of these can be overcome if sensible precautions are taken.

2. Give your child opportunities to be active

Look for opportunities for your child to be more active and encourage them to take advantage of some of these:

- ♥ as part of their everyday routine
e.g. walking to school, playing outside rather than watching TV
- ♥ through informal activity in their leisure time
e.g. cycling, rollerblading, dancing to music at home, have a kick-around etc., with friends, going to the leisure centre for a swim
- ♥ through taking part in specific activity sessions in their leisure time e.g. after school activity sports clubs (ask your children's teacher what is on offer), activities at the leisure centre at local community centres and local sports clubs.



3. Help your child to practise basic skills

Give your child a chance to practise skills such as running, jumping, throwing, catching, striking and kicking, either with you or with friends – providing a few basic pieces of equipment such as balls and skipping ropes can encourage them. Being more competent at these basic skills will increase their confidence and enjoyment when participating in many physical activities and games – but don't forget learning a new skill can take time.

4. Encourage your child

Praise and encourage your child when they are taking part in an activity, particularly when they are learning a new skill. Keep your feedback positive and don't push too hard – young people will only continue participation in an activity if they enjoy the experience. Make sure competitive activities put winning into perspective and are age appropriate.

5. Participate in activities together

Try to do some activities as a family e.g. walking or hiking, cycling, swimming, playing tennis. This will help children to develop a positive attitude about physical activity.

6. Be a role model

Children learn by watching what their parents do. Show your child that you enjoy and value activity by taking part yourself – even simple things like walking short journeys instead of using the car can have a big influence.

Tips and tools for encouraging your child to be active

- ♥ Help and encourage your child to choose what activities they like doing. Make physical activity a treat.
- ♥ Encourage your child to play games with others (friends, brothers, sisters) – children of primary school age often prefer doing activity with others.
- ♥ Think of ways to increase the amount of incidental activity your child does – small changes can make a significant difference over time e.g. if you have an upstairs and downstairs toilet at home, encourage your child to use the upstairs toilet; hide the remote control for the TV (only use it if it is to look at Aertel); always try to use the stairs instead of lifts and escalators and if you do have to use an escalator, don't just stand still on it, walk up or down; if you have to use the car to go shopping, park further away from the shops, not in the space right next to the door!
- ♥ Always take precautions to ensure your child's safety when being active – make sure they wear any necessary protective equipment e.g. cycle helmet; check the area in which they are playing is safe; and ensure they have adequate supervision (this is important, but if possible, do try and let your child practise some independence).
- ♥ Provide basic pieces of sports equipment e.g. balls, skipping rope, tennis racquet. Let the children organise their own activities.

- ♥ Encourage your child to keep a record of all the activity they do. The Irish Heart Foundation's colourful **Pocket Play Pack** is ideal for this – not only does it provide charts for your child to record their activity over six weeks but it also suggests some activity they may like to try. See page 17 to find out how you can order a free **Pocket Play Pack**.
- ♥ Teach your child how to ride a bicycle. Ensure they wear a helmet, know the rules of the road and have a road-worthy bike.
- ♥ Show your child how to do household chores, think of ones that involve moving around, e.g. helping in the garden, or washing the car.
- ♥ Enrol your child in an activity club. Make sure they are involved in making the decision.
- ♥ Find a safe area for them to play. Perhaps in the garden, if it is big enough, or at the local park with adults taking it in turns to supervise.
- ♥ Encourage your child to try activities which are not high profile (i.e. unlikely to be in school or on TV) - cycling, walking, swimming, badminton, dancing and rollerblading are all fun activities which your child could be doing when they leave school.



Encouraging activity at home

There are a lot of ways your child can be active in and around the home, and many are great ways for you and your child to be active together.

- ♥ Put some music on or an appropriate music video and encourage your child to dance. Even better dance with them!
- ♥ Ask your child to help you with specific house-hold chores e.g. clear out their bedroom together.
- ♥ Encourage your child to be independent as young as possible e.g. ask them to make their own bed, get themselves drinks and tidy up after themselves.
- ♥ Walk with your child to the local shop or post box.
- ♥ Walk with your child to and from school.
- ♥ Make it a family ritual to go for a walk after dinner.
- ♥ Set 'rules' on the amount of time your child can spend watching television and playing video and computer games.
- ♥ Provide softballs and indoor equipment to allow your child to create games and be active inside.
- ♥ Spend time playing active games with your child in the house and garden e.g. 'chase', hide-and-seek, hopscotch or skipping.

Try to include at least one of these activities each day.



Encouraging activity in leisure time

Children have lots of 'free' time after school, at weekends and during school holidays. These provide ideal opportunities for your child to do activity.

- ♥ Encourage your child to spend more time outdoors – let them invite friends over to play.
- ♥ Talk to parents of other local children and arrange games in the local park or time in the playground – take it in turns to supervise.
- ♥ Make a kite with your child and fly it together.
- ♥ Check what after-school clubs are available at your child's school and encourage them to try one.
- ♥ Visit your local community centre and leisure centre and check local papers to see what clubs and activities are available for your child to join. Encourage them to try one – getting one of their friends to go along too will probably help.
- ♥ Go out for a walk or cycle at the weekend with your child or go for a swim at the local pool.
- ♥ If there are not many opportunities or facilities for children to be active in your local area, encourage the county council or community to do something about it.
- ♥ During school holidays, try to provide your child with opportunities to be active – with friends or with family.
- ♥ Check if there are any local activity schemes being organised during the school holidays such as summer camps – many schools, community centres and sports clubs now do this.
- ♥ Remember, children should be encouraged to try out a range of sports when they are young.

Food and rest are important too!

As well as being active, it is also important that your child eats well and has adequate rest:

- ♥ Contact the Irish Heart Foundation or Health Promotion Unit's website (see page 17) or ask your local health promotion unit in your local health board for leaflets on healthy eating.
- ♥ Encourage your child to have breakfast before they leave for school – set a good example by having breakfast yourself.
- ♥ Make sure your child has four or more portions of fruit and vegetables every day.
- ♥ Children need to eat often especially when they are being active. Try to make sure there are nutritious snacks available – bananas are a great source of energy!
- ♥ Try to sit down as a family for at least one meal a day. This is a great time for talking with your child about what they have been doing that day.
- ♥ Try to make sure your child has 8 – 10 hours sleep each night.
- ♥ Set a time for your child to go to bed. Try and spend a little time reading with them before they go to bed – this will help them unwind and improve their reading.
- ♥ When children are active they will need lots of fluid such as water or unsweetened fruit juice. Avoid giving children carbonated or fizzy drinks as they are high in calories.

Choosing the right activities for your child

- ♥ Children should try a variety of activities as they are more likely to find a few that they enjoy.
- ♥ Ask your child what activities they enjoy and why. This will help you suggest other similar activities they might like to try.
- ♥ Don't let your child's activity choices be limited by gender stereotypes.
- ♥ Consider what activities are available locally and how convenient these are.
- ♥ Check the costs of activities – does your child need special clothing and equipment? How much will each activity session cost?
- ♥ Focus on fun and skill development – children say these are important things that motivate them.
- ♥ Make sure that the activities your child does will provide realistic challenges which match their skill and development levels.
- ♥ Make sure competitive activities are age appropriate and put winning into perspective. Most children like to compete and try to win, but it is important that your child realises that winning is not always possible.



How good are your child's activity leaders and coaches?

If your child is taking part in organised activities or sports outside of school, it is important to check that their leader or coach:

- ♥ has a recognised certificate or qualification from a relevant organisation and appropriate references
- ♥ is running an activity session which is endorsed by a respected organisation in the community.

Other things to look out for include whether the leader/coach:

- ♥ adjusts activities to match different age groups and children's differing needs and abilities e.g. uses appropriate small-sided games
- ♥ encourages fun and participation and where appropriate, includes the right amount of competition rather than focusing on winning at all costs
- ♥ ensures a safe playing environment – a play area free from hazards, and the use of appropriate protective equipment
- ♥ promotes fair play and sporting behaviour
- ♥ provides your child with opportunities to practice new skills
- ♥ provides your child with the chance to try new positions or activities.

If you have any concerns, discuss this with the leader/coach, club or organisation

What if your child has a disability?

The benefits of physical activity for children with a disability can be even greater than for other children so it is important that they do not miss out. It may not be possible for them to do all activities, but in many cases all that is needed is a slight adaptation.

General guidelines for adapting activity

Equipment: larger/lighter bats or racquets; various types of ball (different sizes, weight, colour, texture); larger goals or targets; scoops for catching activities.

Playing area: decrease size; create 'level playing field' e.g. in tennis, children with disabilities use singles courts and those with more mobility cover doubles courts.

Time: slow down the pace of a game/activity; lengthen the time allowed to perform tasks or remove time limits; provide frequent rest periods.

Rules/cues: modify rules e.g. in netball extend the three second rule to six seconds; reduce/simplify rules; use oral prompts.

Some other guidelines are listed below:

- ♥ Be patient – and encourage them with praise for any progress.
- ♥ When doing activities with other children explain why your child may have to do things slightly differently.
- ♥ Try not to be overprotective. If you are worried about what they should be allowed to do, check with their family doctor or other health professional.
- ♥ To take part in an organised activity/sport, arrange to meet the leader/coach to discuss your child's particular needs and capabilities.

Who can I ask for help?

If you would like advice on helping your child to be more active, here are some organisations you could contact

National organisations

For more information on young people, children and physical activity contact:

Irish Heart Foundation

4 Clyde Road,
Ballsbridge,
Dublin 4.
Tel: 01 668 5001.
www.irishheart.ie

Department of Health and Children

Health Promotion Unit,
www.healthpromotion.ie

Irish Sports Council

The Irish Sports Council serves as an access point for contacting the National Governing Bodies of individual sports such as GAA, soccer, rugby, basketball and cycling.

The Irish Sports Council also has contact details the following disability sports organisations: Blind Sport, Deaf Sport, Wheelchair Sport, Cerebral Palsy Sport and the Special Olympics.

Irish Sports Council
21 Fitzwilliam Square,
Dublin 2.
Tel: 01 240 7700.
www.irishsportsCouncil.ie

Diabetes Federation of Ireland

The Sweetpea Kidz Club has been set up by the Diabetes Federation of Ireland for young children with diabetes and their siblings. For information on diabetes and children contact the Diabetes Federation of Ireland on
Tel: 1850 909 909
www.diabetes.ie

At school

If you have any questions about the kinds of activity your child receives at school, contact the PE Teacher or Principal.

Local organisations

For information on activities in your local area contact the Health Promotion Unit of your local Health Board. Also check local community centres, leisure centres, the library and local newspapers for information.

Useful websites

These websites are child friendly and could provide more information on physical activity:

www.cul4kidz.com
www.youthhealthne.ie
www.nrgize.co.uk
www.kidshealth.org
www.welltown.gov.uk (5 – 7 years)
www.galaxy-h.gov.uk (7 – 11 years)
www.4girls.gov (7 – 11 years)
www.cyh.com.au (11 – 14 years)
www.lifebytes.cov.uk (11 – 14 years)
www.mindbodysoul.gov.uk (14 – 18 years)

Get Kids on the Go

- Children and young people should be physically active for one hour every day.
- Activity sessions can be spread out through the day.
- All activity counts - short sessions of active play and fun, as well as PE, sport and exercise.
- A mixture of different activities for shorter times is better than one activity for a long time.
- Encourage children to try out a range of different activities.
- Parents can play an important role by being active themselves and as a family.

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