

GET UP & GROW

HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD



Keeping children on the move



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing



Young children are eager to move. However, some daily practices and activities are actually limiting children's opportunities to be active.

When children are kept inactive for long periods of time, such as in strollers or in front of television and computer screens, they have less time for regular physical activity. This can also limit time for other developmentally important activities, such as reading, art and crafts, and doing puzzles. Long periods of time spent sitting down can have a negative effect on your child's health, and habits formed in early life influence lifelong behaviours.

Limit screen-time

There are Australian recommendations regarding screen-time which advise that children under two years of age do not spend any time in front of screens. Exposure to screens at a young age can reduce the amount of time your child has for active play and social contact with others, as well as chances for language development. Screen-time can also reduce the length of time children can stay focused.

The recommendations also advise that screen-time for children two to five years should be limited to less than one hour per day. Watching large amounts of television in early childhood has been linked to an increased risk of being overweight, unhealthy eating patterns, poorer muscle and bone growth, and slower development of language skills. Screen-time has also been associated with low physical activity levels and television habits that continue into later childhood.

Regardless of how active they may be at other times, it is still important to consider the amount of screen-time your child is exposed to.

‘Long periods of time, spent sitting down can have a negative effect on your child’s health...’

Ways to manage or limit screen-time

- Have simple play items handy, such as old cardboard boxes, balls, balloons or wooden blocks.
- Encourage your child to make up games and activities that are based on their imagination.
- Record any favourite television shows if they clash with chances for outdoor play.
- Turn off the television during mealtimes.
- Do not place screens in bedrooms.

Rethinking your daily habits when it comes to inactivity is a great way to encourage your child to be more active in everyday life.



Limit stroller time

Active transport is a term that describes using physical activity, such as walking, pedalling or using a scooter, to travel – instead of driving a car or pushing a stroller.

Although it is often easier and quicker to put your child in a stroller, young children are capable of walking or pedalling a bicycle, even if it is just for a short amount of time. Allowing time for you and your child to be ‘active pedestrians’ is a fantastic way to increase physical activity.

Walking or pedalling to a destination also provides chances for your child to:

- learn about road and pedestrian safety
- learn about nature, and enjoy being in outdoor areas
- become more confident in public spaces
- appreciate different ways of being active
- develop leg strength, so they can later walk and pedal longer distances.

You and your child can try using active transport by:

- parking a little further away and allowing enough time to walk the rest of the way
- walking or pedalling greater distances each time
- walking, pedalling or using a scooter to get to local destinations, such as your early childhood setting.



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