

## **FYI: The Importance of Physical Activity**

Participating in physical activity, or exercise, is essential for children and adults to stay fit, healthy, and feeling great. Increasingly, many adults and children do not get the exercise they need. Americans today are more sedentary than ever. Television, video games, computers, the Internet, and sedentary jobs have made people sit more and move less. In fact, it has been estimated that many children will watch 5,000 hours of TV before entering first grade! This is a serious problem since inactivity is a major predictor of obesity and other chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes.

Physical activity does the following:

- Burns calories
- Relieves stress
- Helps increase lean body mass (muscle) and decrease fat
- Builds strong bones and strengthens the heart
- Speeds up the metabolism—which means that more calories are burned, even while the body is at rest
- Can help to prevent obesity, heart disease, and diabetes
- Makes people look and feel better
- Helps children develop coordination and stamina
- Helps children focus and pay better attention at school
- Is associated with higher academic test scores

Variety is important in exercise. Ideally, aerobic activities such as running, swimming, skating, kickboxing, biking, jump roping, or dancing should be combined with anaerobic activities such as weight training. When both types of activities are included, fat burning and muscle building both occur. Everyday activities such as sweeping, vacuuming, gardening, or walking up and down stairs also count as exercise.

Physical activity engages the mind in problem solving, negotiations, autonomous thinking, imagination, and flexibility. Furthermore, children should be given time to participate in play that includes physical activity to develop fine and gross motor movements.

### **Physical activity recommendations**

- Children should be physically active for at least 60 minutes every day.
- Adults should be physically active at least 30 minutes at a moderate to vigorous intensity (at a minimum, regular-paced walking) on most days of the week.
- Stretching the muscles before and after exercising can help to prevent injuries.

**Helpful tips**

- Find several activities you enjoy doing.
- Make a plan to be physically active. Schedule time for physical activity several days a week. Get all the equipment together you might need, such as shoes, knee pads, rollerblades, workout clothes, or soccer balls.
- If you are having trouble getting motivated, find an exercise partner.
- Start slowly and work your way up to a more rigorous and longer workout. If you overdo it, you may injure yourself or feel defeated from unrealistic goals. For example, start out by taking a brisk walk; then work your way up to jogging or running.
- Physical activities do not have to be sports-related; household chores and yard work are good alternatives.
- Get the whole family involved in physical activity. Plan an activity for the family once a week, such as an afternoon at the park.
- Most importantly, have fun!