

## Healthy Habits: Movement

Healthy activity habits are passed down from parents' examples and imitated by children.

From infancy, your child is learning from your own level of activity, movement, and time outdoors. Being consistent with family movement time will help your child to develop healthy, lifelong routines.

### Daily Walks

One of the best habits a family can practice is a daily, 30 to 60 minute walk. Walking is one of the healthiest forms of exercise for humans of all ages! Babies grow from being carried, to enjoying a stroller ride, and eventually progress to walking part and then all of the way themselves each day. Plan your walk with safety and exposure to nature in mind. Walking the same route each day provides many benefits: relaxation, consistency and predictability, stress reduction, alternating between target focus and field focus, crossing paths with other walkers, observing the changes of nature throughout four seasons, and ample opportunities for training your child in pedestrian safety habits. You can change your pace throughout the walk, strolling more slowly to observe a favorite tree or splash in puddles, and speeding up to walk or gallop vigorously “from the big shrub all the way to the corner.”

Games that can make walks more interesting and fun and that train impulse control – such as “red light, green light,” “funny walks,” “run to the tree and back,” and simple interval movement games – are often highlights for the child's entire day!



### Infants

Tummy time on the floor is important! Despite the many products that are marketed to parents – swings, walkers, strollers, high chairs, bouncers, floor seats, loungers, carriers, etc. – babies need ample time out of containers throughout the day to **stretch, reach, and kick**. This unrestricted movement leads to **rolling, creeping, crawling, and sitting up naturally**. Pick a floor area with a safe covering, remove hazards and “no touch” items to avoid injuries and conflicts, and stay close enough so that you can interact and supervise! A thick blanket beneath baby on the grass at a shady park provides opportunities for similar movement outdoors in nature.

### Toddlers and Preschoolers

Even the most active children need scheduled times throughout the day for big movement. Find ways and spaces where your child is allowed to **jump, run, climb, and crawl indoors** and outdoors. Outdoors is best, but children need opportunities for **large movement, indoors**, throughout the day as well. If you have a “no jumping on the couch” rule, be sure to identify an indoor “jumping space” that is acceptable. Imitative movement games and dance are great way to move with your child!

### Avoid

Electronic entertainments including phones, handhelds, games, TVs and other devices that keep children still. When electronic entertainment is unavoidable in your schedule, consider limiting total daily exposure to less than two hours per day and never make them available in play rooms or in sleeping rooms. Adults can set the best example by making outdoor time and movement time device-free time too!

#### Sources

1. American Academy of Pediatrics [aap.org](http://aap.org)
2. [FamilyFitness.about.com](http://FamilyFitness.about.com)
3. Head Start National Center on Health, Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center
4. [KidsHealth.com](http://KidsHealth.com)
5. [WalkingFamilies.co.uk](http://WalkingFamilies.co.uk)