



Feeding the under 3s
the food they need

Physical Activity and Play for Toddlers

Guidance & Tips for Parents

www.infantandtoddlerforum.org

Physical activity is vital for your toddler's development and to help him/her maintain a normal weight. The Department of Health recommends that children under five years who can walk should be active for at least three hours each day.



Toddlers learn eagerly and most want to try new activities. Encouraging your toddler to keep physically active will help him/her to:

- Develop movement skills
- Stay a healthy weight
- Keep up with friends in the playground and in sporting activities as they get older
- Keep a healthy heart.

If toddlers learn to enjoy games and sport and then continue playing them at school, their school work will benefit. Be patient; some toddlers take longer than others to learn new skills. Some are better co-ordinated than others. Keep gently encouraging, make it fun and give lots of praise.

Keeping you and your toddler more active:

- Park your car further away from where you are heading so that everyone has a walk to get there
- Encourage your toddler to walk everywhere rather than confining him/her in a stroller – use reins to keep him/her safe while letting him/her walk.
- Climb stairs together rather than using escalators and lifts

Ideas to make walking more fun:

- Count something as you go along e.g. birds, trees, aeroplanes, white cars
- Visit the playground on your way to or from somewhere and allow your toddlers to run, climb and play on the equipment for 20-30 minutes
- Have a race to a visible landmark – give your toddler an earlier start or let him/her use a scooter or bike
- Kick piles of leaves during walks on autumn days.

Fun activities for indoors or outdoors:

- Play 'keep it up' with a balloon
- Play hide and seek
- Have a dance-a-thon
- Read stories and sing songs that require actions in time with the words
- Play catch with a bean bag
- Dance or jump to music
- Plan an in/outdoor treasure hunt
- Make a den.
- Play musical statues

Rough and tumble play is also fun, particularly for boys, so only stop it if it seems unsafe. Fathers often play rough and tumble with their children – which they enjoy.



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Keeping your toddler active outdoors

If you don't have your own garden take your toddler to a playground or local park every day:

- Play hide and seek
- Play chasing games
- Find a slope to do roly polys
- Play with a ball – encourage your toddler to kick, throw or roll it and learn to catch a large soft ball with both hands
- Play with a bat and ball; help your toddler hit a ball along the ground or gently throw it to him or her underarm and encourage them to hit it with the bat
- Go on a nature hunt. You can collect leaves/twigs/berries to make a decoration/collage
- Play in a paddling pool on warm summer days.



When it rains: put on waterproofs and go for a walk and jump in puddles.

When it snows: make and throw snow balls, build a snowman, fill a sledge with soft toys/dolls and pull them around the park/garden, make snow angels by lying on your back in soft snow and moving your arms up and down.

Check out your local amenities and go swimming, to a soft play area, try out active play sessions run by children's centres or programmes such as SoccerTots® and Tumble Tots.

Help your toddler achieve these skills by making sure s/he has opportunities to try. If someone is showing him/her, then s/he can learn to copy:

- By the age of 2-3 years: jumping, hopping, galloping, climbing a climbing frame, kicking a ball, throwing a ball and hitting a ball with a bat
- By the age of 3-4 years: catching a ball, riding a scooter, riding a two-wheeled bike with stabilisers.

Messy play: Getting used to putting their hands in different textures can help toddlers who are fussy about their food.

Pretend play: When toddlers play with toys and other objects and pretend they are people, they are learning about the world around them.

Sleep: Make sure your toddlers gets about 12 hours sleep in each 24 hours – toddlers perform better if they are getting enough sleep and they sleep better after a day full of activity.

Physically active toddlers should be in a safe environment and supervised at all times.

