Fitness for Preschoolers

The National Association of Sports and Physical Education recommends that every day preschoolers should:

- Get at least 60 minutes of structured physical activity (adult-led activity)
- Get at least 60 minutes of unstructured physical activity (free play)
- Not be inactive for more than 1 hour at a time (unless sleeping)

Kids this age are learning to hop, skip, and jump forward, and are eager to show off how they can balance on one foot (for 5 seconds or longer), catch a ball, or do a somersault.

Preschoolers might also enjoy swimming, hiking, dancing, and riding a tricycle or bicycle with training wheels.

Many parents look to organized sports to get preschoolers active. But the average 4- or 5-year-old has not mastered even the basics, such as throwing, catching, and taking turns. Even simple rules may be hard for them to understand, as any parent who has watched their child run the wrong way during a game knows.

And starting too young can be frustrating for kids and may discourage future participation in sports. So if you decide to sign your preschooler up for soccer or another team sport, be sure to choose a peewee league that emphasizes the fundamentals. No matter what the sport or activity, remember that fitness should be fun. If your child isn’t having fun, ask why and try to address the issue or find another activity.

Family Fitness Tips

Walking, playing, running in the park or yard, or using playground equipment at a local park can be fun for the entire family. Other activities to try together, or for a group of preschoolers to enjoy, include:

Playing games such as:
- "Duck, Duck, Goose" or "Follow the Leader"
  - Mixing it up with jumping, hopping, and walking backward
  - Kicking a ball back and forth or Hitting a ball off a T-ball stand
  - Playing freeze dance or freeze tag
  - Pretending to be statues to practice balancing

Kids can be active even when they’re stuck indoors, find a safe play area & try some active inside games:

- Treasure hunt: Hide "treasures" throughout the house and provide clues to their locations.
- Obstacle course: Set up an obstacle course with chairs, and boxes, for the kids to go over, under, through, and around.
- Soft-ball games: Use soft foam balls to play indoor basketball, bowling, soccer, or catch.
- Volleyball: You can even use balloons to play volleyball or catch.
Fitness for School Age Kids

The National Association of Sports and Physical Education recommends every day school age kids should:

- Get 1 hour or more of moderate and vigorous physical activity on most or all days
- Also participate in several bouts of physical activity of 15 minutes or more each day
- Avoid periods of inactivity of 2 hours or more (unless sleeping)

Fitness at Home

Many parents and kids think of organized sports when they think of fitness. Though there are many advantages to signing a child up for the softball team, practice and games once or twice a week will not be enough to reach activity goals. In addition, parents can no longer rely on physical education in the schools to provide enough physical activity for kids.

**Here are some ways to keep your kids moving at home:**

- **Incorporate physical activity into the daily routine** from household chores to an after-dinner walk keep your family active.
- **Allow enough time for free play.**
  
  → Kids can burn more calories and have more fun when left to their own devices. Playing tag, riding bikes around the neighborhood, and building snowmen are fun and healthy.
- **Keep a variety of games and sports equipment on hand.** It doesn’t have to be expensive — an assortment of balls, Frisbee, hula-hoops, and jump ropes can keep kids busy for hours.
- **Be active together.** It’ll get you moving and kids love to play with their parents.
- **Limit time spent in sedentary activities,** such as TV, going online, and playing video games.

When you have exhausted the possibilities at home, take advantage of local playgrounds and athletic fields.

Make family fitness outings part of your regular routine. Let family members choose an activity: go hiking, bowling, miniature golf, ice skating, swimming, or try out the rock-climbing gym.

You can help show your kids that exercise is important by regularly exercising yourself.

Fitness for Kids

Through physical activities, kids can learn about setting goals, meeting challenges, sportsmanship, teamwork, and the value of practice. Keep in mind your child's age and developmental level, natural abilities, and interests.

Between the ages of 6 and 8, kids are sharpening basic physical skills like jumping, throwing, kicking, and catching. Some kids enjoy doing this in organized sports teams, but non-competitive leagues are best for younger kids. Show your support by coaching your child's team or cheering from the stands on game days.

Kids who are 9 to 12 years old are refining, improving, and coordinating skills. Some become even more committed to a sport while others drop out as competition heats up and level of play improves.

It's OK if a child isn't interested in traditional sports, but it's important to find alternative ways to be active. Encourage a child who doesn't like soccer, basketball, or other team sports to explore other active options, like karate, fencing, golf, bicycling, skateboarding, swimming, or tennis.