Insufficient physical activity is a risk factor for people who are overweight or obese and for many related chronic diseases. Regular physical activity is associated with immediate and long-term health benefits such as easier weight control, lower blood pressure, improved cardio-respiratory function and enhanced psychological well-being. Active children are more likely to become active adults.

As children age into adolescence, their physical activity declines. Increased use of television, video and computer games has resulted in decreased physical activity in American youth. In addition, school-based physical education programs have declined, particularly at the high school level.

Risks of overweight and obesity in children:

- Orthopedic problems
- Type 2 diabetes
- Premature physical development
- Low self-esteem
- Asthma
- Sleep apnea
- Gallstones
- High cholesterol

Physical activity guidelines:

It is recommended that children engage in moderate physical activity at least three times a week for 30 minutes or more and in vigorous physical activity at least twice a week for 20 minutes or more.

Begin training in good activity habits as soon as possible. Include the whole family when possible. Think of the benefits derived from incorporating physical activity in the daily lives in the long term. Make small changes at a time, and make them gradually.
For a child to become physically able to exercise in adulthood, he or she must do different types of physical activity in childhood. The muscles need to be “activated” for them to be able to work later.

Best aerobic activity for children:
The game of TAG. Children like to run very fast for very short periods, then rest and go again.

Toys to have for fun outdoor activity:
- Bike
- Balls for baseball, tennis, soccer
- Frisbee
- Kite
- Monkey bars
- Rope swings or ladders
- Sand box
- Skates
- Sprinklers
- Swing set
- Wading pool
- Jump ropes

Toys to have for indoor activity:
- Boom box
- Hula hoops
- Jump ropes
- Power Pad
- Soft balls
- Bean bags
- Twister
- Indoor basketball hoop
- Mini trampoline
Children’s metabolic systems are ideal for short bursts of vigorous activity followed by periods of low level activities or rest. Aerobic activities for children should include games in which they can have periods of intense activity. The following aerobic activities are ideally suited for children.

**Outdoor aerobic activities:**

- Basketball
- Biking
- Bowling
- Catch
- Fishing
- Football
- Freeze tag
- Frisbee
- Hacky sack
- Hiking
- Hopscotch
- Jump rope
- Kickball
- Kite flying
- Miniature golf
- Ping Pong
- Playing at the park
- Rollerblading
- Running
- Skipping rope
- Softball
- Swimming
- Tag
- T-ball
- Trampoline
Activities children can do at home:

Remember to have fun!

**Outdoor activities:**

- Bagging leaves
- Brushing the dog
- Digging in the sand
- Gardening
- Mowing
- Painting
- Riding a bike
- Raking leaves
- Vacuuming the car
- Walking the dog
- Washing the car
- Weeding in the garden
- Watering plants

**Indoor activities:**

- Cleaning
- Cleaning their room
- Cooking
- Dancing
- Dusting
- Folding clothes
- Making beds
- Picking up toys
- Playing hide and seek
- Playing with the cat
- Sweeping
- Vacuuming
- Washing dishes

References:

6. Healthy People 2010, Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office of Public Health and Science, Washington, DC.

The Pennington Biomedical Research Center is a world-renowned nutrition research center.

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To promote healthier lives through research and education in nutrition and preventive medicine.

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1. Clinical Obesity Research
2. Experimental Obesity
3. Functional Foods
4. Health and Performance Enhancement
5. Nutrition and Chronic Diseases

The research fostered by these divisions can have a profound impact on healthy living and on prevention of common chronic diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, hypertension and osteoporosis.

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