



WHY EXERCISE IS IMPORTANT

First of all, let's look at the difference between exercise and physical activity.

Physical activity is movement that is carried out by the muscles that requires energy. In other words, any movement one does is actually physical activity. **Exercise** is planned, structured, repetitive and purposeful movement that is intended to improve or maintain physical fitness.

Children who exercise are more likely to maintain an active lifestyle as an adult, but what child wants to consciously 'exercise'? It's hard enough for some adults to find the motivation, but as adults, we're more aware of the importance of moving and the risks when we don't move our bodies enough. Exercise should be enjoyable at all ages, but it's especially important that children enjoy moving to build long lasting habits and help them to achieve and maintain optimal physical and mental health.

Engaging in physical activity or exercise offers children the following benefits:

- » Helps to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight
- » Increases positive mental health and helps children to relax
- » Improves self-esteem and confidence
- » Helps to build strong bones, muscles and joints
- » Promotes healthy growth and development
- » Reduces the risk of developing, and helps to manage, chronic disease such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease
- » Reduces the risk of, and assists with rehabilitation from, some cancers

It's not just the physical and mental benefits that makes being active during childhood important, there are also a host of social benefits. Encouraging play outdoors often involves interaction with other children and promotes active play (such as throwing a ball or riding a bike).

 **Active Children = Active Adults** 

Why is it important that children get moving when they're young? Because active kids develop physical literacy!

Physical literacy is the knowledge and understanding of how to move your body, the confidence and motivation to move, and the social skills to be active with other people.

Research suggests that engaging in physical activity as a child predicts participation in physical activity and exercise as an adult. This ensures the benefits of physical activity carry through from childhood to adulthood, reducing the risk of chronic disease, illness and injuries. Conversely, those who do not participate in physical activity as a child are unlikely to be active as adolescents and adults; they are less competent, confident and motivated to move.



THE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN

Australia has developed [Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines](#) which outline the minimum amount of physical activity required for children and adolescents to obtain health benefits, and recommendations for reducing time spent in front of screens.

The physical activity recommendations for healthy growth and development in the early years are:

- » **Infants (birth to one year)** should be encouraged from birth to engage in physical activity particularly through supervised interactive floor-based play in safe environments. For those not yet mobile, 30 minutes of tummy time including reaching and grasping, pushing and pulling, and crawling spread throughout the day during awake periods is encouraged.
- » **Toddlers (aged 1–2)** should spend at least 180 minutes a day doing a variety of physical activities including energetic play such as running, jumping and twirling spread throughout the day – noting more is better.
- » **Pre-schoolers (aged 3–5)** should spend at least 180 minutes a day in a variety of physical activities, of which 60 minutes is energetic play such as running, jumping and kicking and throwing, spread throughout the day – noting more is better.

For ages 5–17, children and adolescents should achieve the recommended balance of high levels of physical activity, low levels of sedentary behaviour, and sufficient sleep each day for optimal health benefits. A healthy 24 hours includes:



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- » Accumulating 60 minutes or more of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per day involving mainly aerobic activities (i.e. brisk walking, swimming, running).
- » Several hours of a variety of light physical activities.
- » Activities that are vigorous, as well as those that strengthen muscle and bone should be incorporated at least 3 days per week.
- » To achieve greater health benefits, replace sedentary time with additional moderate-to-vigorous physical activity, while preserving sufficient sleep.



SEDENTARY BEHAVIOUR

- » Break up long periods of sitting as often as possible.
- » Limit sedentary recreational screen-time to no more than 2 hours per day.
- » When using screen-based electronic media, positive social interactions and experiences are encouraged.



SLEEP

- » An uninterrupted 9 to 11 hours of sleep per night for those aged 5–13 and 8 to 10 hours per night for those aged 14–17.
- » Have consistent bed and wake-up times.



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS OF AUSSIE CHILDREN

Participating in physical activity and limiting sedentary behaviour is vital to a child's health, development and psychosocial well-being. However, a report card released by [Active Healthy Kids Australia](#) in late 2018 scored the physical activity levels of Australian children as a D-minus. It also ranked Australia at number 32 out of 49 countries for children's physical activity levels.

AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN SCORED  IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS

Research from 2019 found that the physical activity levels of Australian teens (aged 15–17) is particularly poor; we ranked 140 out of 146 countries for adolescent exercise levels.

The [Australian Health Survey \(AHS\) 2011-2012](#) indicates that only 1 in 3 children, and 1 in 10 adolescents, undertook the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity every day. These findings highlight that only 19% of Australian children and adolescents aged 5–17 are accumulating 60 minutes of exercise every day of the week, while only 33% to 39% of primary school students are engaging in at least 120 minutes of exercise per week.

33-39% of primary school students ARE engaging IN 120 mins of exercise PER WEEK