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Newsletter for Parents of SAMA Member Schools

Edited from Children and Exercise
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When most adults think about exercise, they imagine working out in the gym on a treadmill or lifting weights. But for children, exercise means playing and being physically active.

The Many Benefits of Exercise: Everyone can benefit from regular exercise. Children who are active will:

- have stronger muscles and bones
- have a leaner body because exercise helps control body fat
- be less likely to become overweight
- decrease the risk of developing type 2 diabetes
- possibly lower blood pressure and blood cholesterol levels
- have a better outlook on life

In addition to the health benefits of regular exercise, children who are physically fit sleep better and are better able to handle the physical and emotional challenges that a typical day presents — be that running to catch a bus, bending down to tie a shoe, or studying for a test.

The Three Elements of Fitness: If you've ever watched children on a playground, you've seen the three elements of fitness in action. They are endurance, strength and flexibility.

Parents should encourage their children to do a variety of activities so that they can work on all three elements. Endurance is developed when children regularly engage in aerobic activity. During aerobic exercise, the heart beats faster and a person breathes harder. When done regularly and for continuous periods of time, aerobic activity strengthens the heart and improves the body's ability to deliver oxygen to all its cells.

Improving strength doesn't have to mean lifting weights. Although some children benefit from lifting weights, it should be done under the supervision of an experienced adult who works with them. But most children don't need a formal weight-training program to be strong. Children incorporate strength activities in their play when they climb, do a handstand, or wrestle. Stretching exercises help improve flexibility, allowing muscles and joints to bend and move easily through their full range of motion.

The Sedentary Problem

The percentage of overweight children has more than doubled over the past 30 years. Although many factors contribute to this epidemic, children are becoming more sedentary. In other words, they're sitting around a lot more than they used to.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the average child is watching about 3 hours of television a day. And the average child spends 5½ hours on all media combined, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Young children should not be inactive for prolonged periods of time — no more than 1 hour unless they're sleeping. And school-age children should not be inactive for periods longer than 2 hours.

One of the best ways to get children to be more active is to limit the amount of time spent in sedentary activities, especially watching TV or playing video games. The AAP recommends that children under the age of 2 years watch no TV at all and that screen time should be limited to no more than 1 to 2 hours of quality programming a day for children 2 years and older.

How Much Exercise Is Enough?

Here are the current activity recommendations for children, according to the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE):

Age	Minimum Daily Activity	Comments
Infant	No specific requirements	Physical activity should encourage motor development
Toddler	1½ hours	30 minutes planned physical activity AND 60 minutes unstructured physical activity (free play)
Preschooler	2 hours	60 minutes planned physical activity AND 60 minutes unstructured physical activity (free play)
School age	1 hour or more	Break up into bouts of 15 minutes or more

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