
Fitness and Your 2- to 3-Year-Old

Kids this age are walking and running, kicking, and throwing. They're naturally active, so be sure to provide lots of chances for your child to practice and build on these skills.

How much is enough? Physical activity guidelines for toddlers recommend that each day they:

- get at least 30 minutes of structured (adult-led) physical activity
- get at least 60 minutes of unstructured (active free play) physical activity
- not be inactive for more than 1 hour at a time except when sleeping

What Kids Can Do

It's important to understand what kids can do and what skills are appropriate for this age. By age 2, toddlers should be able to walk and run well. They might be able to kick a ball and jump in place with both feet. By age 3, toddlers usually can balance briefly on one foot, kick a ball forward, throw a ball overhand, catch a ball, and pedal a tricycle.

Keep these skills in mind when encouraging your child to be active. Play games together and provide age-appropriate active toys, such as balls, push and pull toys, and riding vehicles. Through practice, toddlers will continue to improve and refine their motor skills.

Mommy-and-me programs can introduce toddlers to tumbling, dance, and general movement. But you don't have to enroll kids in a formal program to foster these skills. The most important thing is to provide lots of opportunities to be active in a safe environment.

Family Fitness Tips

Walking, playing, exploring your backyard, or using playground equipment at a local park can be fun for the entire family.

Also, these games provide fun and fitness for parents and toddlers:

- Walk like a penguin, hop like a frog, or imitate other animals' movements.
- Sit facing each other and hold hands. Rock back and forth and sing the song "Row, row, row your boat."
- Bend at the waist and touch the ground. Walk your hands forward and inch along like a caterpillar.
- Sit on the ground and let your child step over your legs, or make a bridge with your body and let your child crawl under.
- Play follow the leader, "Ring around the rosie," and other similar games.
- Listen to music and dance together.

The possibilities are endless — come up with your own active ideas or follow your child's lead. Also, limit the amount of time your child spends watching TV (including DVDs and videos) or playing on a computer, tablet, or smartphone.

When Should I Call the Doctor?

If your child doesn't want to play or join other kids in sports or complains of pain during or after being active, talk with your doctor.

Kids who are active at young age tend to stay active throughout their lives. And staying fit can improve self-esteem, prevent obesity, and decrease the risk of serious illnesses such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease later in life.

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