

# Physical activity for health information sheet for parents/carers

## Did you know that most children and young people are not as active as they should be?

In fact, less than 50% of children and young people in England meet the current recommendation of an average of 60+ minutes a day and nearly 30% are active for less than 30 minutes a day (Sport England, 2019). Furthermore, fewer girls than boys are active across all age groups, and activity declines among girls and boys during adolescence.

## What does activity offer to children and young people?

Being active provides a range of psychological (mental), social and physical benefits.

Physical benefits include:

- reduced body fat,
- reduced hypertension (high blood pressure),
- improved skeletal health, and
- reduced likelihood of risk factors for chronic conditions (e.g., heart disease, diabetes).

Psychological (mental) health benefits include:

- increased self-confidence and self-worth and
- reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Social health benefits include:

- improved social skills (e.g., ability to relate to others) and
- enhanced sense of fair play and justice.

## Why is it particularly important for children and young people to be active?

The physical health benefits of activity are particularly important both because cardiorespiratory disease originates in childhood and because of increasing obesity rates among children. The psychological (mental) and social health benefits are particularly important given the global prevalence (about 20 percent) of mental health disorders among children and adolescents. Growing evidence also indicates that being active exerts a positive effect on children and young people's cognitive function and academic achievement.

## How active should children and young people be?

To maximise the health benefits of activity, all children and young people should be active for an average of at least 60 minutes per day across the week. This time should involve moderate- to vigorous-intensity activities that increase breathing rate and heart rate and make the body feel warm or hot.

It should include a variety of types and intensities of physical activity across the week to develop movement skills, muscular fitness, and bone strength. Furthermore, all children and young people should aim to minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary (e.g. sitting), and when possible should break up long periods of not moving with at least light activity.

## How can you help your child/teenager be more active?

You can encourage your child/teenager to meet the 'one hour a day' recommendation and to appreciate the health benefits associated with this. You can also help them be creative about the range of activity possibilities available to them, even in restricted spaces. You can also assist your child/teenager in making time for activity and finding effective ways of building activity into daily life (e.g., by walking, cycling, scootering or doing home-based exercises).

In addition, you might want to suggest ways of being active together such as doing exercises/stretchers in the home. You might choose to follow some exercise videos available online (e.g. #ThisIsPE). It may also be helpful to discuss with your child/teenager their attitude to being active and to help them develop a positive attitude and proactive approach towards building activity into their daily routine.