



The Importance of Physical Activity for Toddlers

Toddlers love moving around and getting active, and there's a good reason for that: it makes them feel great! Moving our bodies causes a rush of endorphins, or happy hormones, bursts of adrenaline and lots of satisfaction. So, it's no wonder little ones always want to run off when they see a playground or the chance to hop and skip as even from a young age they learn it makes them feel happy and want to do it. Pre-schoolers don't really want to sit still and be inactive for long periods, and they don't need to be, unless they're asleep! For best health and development, movement is important every day.

Lots of the crucial developmental milestones that we observe in children involve physical activity such as being able to climb stairs, running or hopping which all come along naturally when the time is right. It is important for grown-ups to give toddlers the opportunity to meet those milestones by offering them lots of chances for movement throughout the day.

How to incorporate physical activity into your toddler's day

As little-ones naturally want to be moving around all the time, it's easy to make physical activity part of their daytime routine. It's amazing to think toddlers will be active for around 3 hours every day and for many it will be a lot more: even rolling across the floor and jumping up the stairs count as physical activity. For most toddlers, physical activity will be spread throughout their waking day and will include running, jumping, skipping and hopping as part of their ordinary routine.



Dr Ellie Cannon
General Practitioner

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Giving them the chance to scoot, play safely in water, play catch and ball games or learn to use a climbing frame are all great ways to encourage children to have fun being active. Toddlers also love to make a mess, so any messy movements like gardening with an adult or rolling around in the park will be welcome.

Just like for adults, physical activity has lots of benefits for toddlers. All that running and jumping helps them to build strong bones and muscles, improves coordination and helps their little hearts and lungs to be fit. It also becomes a learned behaviour- even from a young age children realise that physical activity makes them feel good and, as a result, it becomes something they want to continue to do and sets them up with healthy habits.

About the contributor

Dr Ellie Cannon is a leading NHS GP with a particular interest in family health. She is familiar to many as the doctor for the Mail on Sunday and has appeared regularly on This Morning, BBC Breakfast, Sky News, and ITV News. In 2022, she was recognised by the medical journalists' association for her writing on mental health. Ellie's most recent book, *Is Your Job Making You Ill?* focuses on health issues at work.



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