



# Preschooler *focus*

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTH-RELATED FITNESS

*Being fit starts with being active. New research shows that physical activity is important for the fitness and health of preschool children, much like it is for schoolchildren and adults. Help your child get a healthy start by creating opportunities for movement through both free play and structured activities.*

### An Active Preschooler Is a Healthy Preschooler

Fitness is usually described in two ways: *Skill-related fitness* is like being able to throw a ball really far; it might help a child play baseball but it won't affect their health. *Health-related fitness* includes only those characteristics that can change a child's health. Examples of health-related fitness are how much muscle or fat a child has, or how long they can keep active before they need to stop for a rest. A high fitness level is considered healthy. Someone with poor fitness is more likely to develop obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure. Physical activity improves fitness in school-aged children, but how it affects the fitness of preschool children was unclear until recently.

The Health Outcomes and Physical activity in Preschoolers (HOPP) Study at McMaster University found that preschoolers who are more physically active have higher fitness levels. Fitness increases when preschoolers spend more time in moderate to vigorous physical activity (activity that makes the heart beat faster). Preschoolers who are more fit also take shorter breaks between activities, have lower blood pressure, more muscle power and do not tire out as quickly. As a parent or caregiver, improving a child's fitness starts with reducing the time they are inactive. Help your child make physical activity a habit, and create lots of opportunities for movement!



### So just how active are Canadian children?

Active Healthy Kids Canada is an organization that encourages physical activity in children. Every year this organization releases a report card that grades the physical activity level of Canadians from coast to coast. This year's report card found that only 7% of school-aged children are getting the recommended 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity a day. For the fifth year in a row, Canada has once again received a failing grade (F) for physical activity levels among school-aged children. This information does not include preschoolers, but it does show the importance of encouraging physical activity in the early years since children generally become less active as they grow older.



Finding ways that the whole family can be active together is a great way of teaching kids the importance of physical activity. Remember that kids learn best by example. Keeping fit can be a family affair!

Being fit shouldn't feel like a chore. Kids will stay active as long as it is fun, so be creative and make physical activity an enjoyable experience.



the  
**HOPP**  
s t u d y

Learn about your preschooler's health and physical activity through a study conducted at McMaster University! Contact Nicole at proudfna@mcmaster.ca or (905) 521-2100 x.77217 or visit us online at fhs.mcmaster.ca/chemp

## New Physical Activity Guidelines for Children Under 5 years old

*Physical activity is important for the health-related fitness of preschool children, but just how much activity should they be getting each day?*

The United Kingdom has released new physical activity guidelines that include guidelines for children under 5 years old. They recommend that 3-5 year olds get 3 hours of physical activity a day. This activity can be of any intensity and can be spread out over the course of the day.

The HOPP Study is the first to show that preschool children who are meeting this recommendation have less body fat than those who are not.

Physical activity is important for the health-related fitness of preschool children, but with little information available, Canada has yet to release its own guidelines for this age group.

### Fall is a Fun Time to be Fit!

The fall breeze and colourful leaves make playing outdoors a whole new adventure. Here are some fun ways you and your preschooler can stay active and fit this season:

- ✦ Go for a brisk nature walk and see how many different kinds of leaves you and your child can find. Bring a bag along and try to collect leaves that are different shapes, sizes and colours. You can also look for pinecones and acorns, or even count the number of squirrels you see along the way.
- ✦ Falling leaves are fun to catch. Make it a game and see who can catch the most leaves in the shortest amount of time.
- ✦ Rake some leaves and let your child jump in the pile. See who can make a bigger pile.
- ✦ Rainy days are no reason to stay indoors. A raincoat and boots are all that your child needs to go splashing around in some puddles.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Active Healthy Kids Canada ([www.activehealthykids.ca](http://www.activehealthykids.ca))

Best Start Resource Centre ([www.beststart.org/haveaballtogether/campaign.html](http://www.beststart.org/haveaballtogether/campaign.html))

Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute ([www.cflri.ca](http://www.cflri.ca))

McMaster University Child Health & Exercise Medicine Program ([fhs.mcmaster.ca/chemp](http://fhs.mcmaster.ca/chemp))

ParticipACTION ([www.participaction.com](http://www.participaction.com))

#### References:

Active Healthy Kids Canada. 2011. Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. Available: <http://www.activehealthykids.ca/>

Gabel, Leigh. "Relationships between Physical Activity and Health Measures in Preschool Children" (2011). *Open Access Dissertations and Theses*. Paper 6111.

Ganley, K. J., Paterno, M. V., Miles, C., Stout, J., Brawner, L., Girolami, G., & Warren, M. (2011). Health-related fitness in children and adolescents. *Pediatric physical therapy*, 23(3), 208-20.

Thivel, D., Isacco, L., Lazaar, N., Aucouturier, J., Ratel, S., Doré, E., Meyer, M., et al. (2011). Effect of a 6-month school-based physical activity program on body composition and physical fitness in lean and obese schoolchildren. *European journal of pediatrics*. Doi: 10.1007/s00431-011-1466-x  
UK Chief Medical Officers. (2011). Start Active, Stay Active. Available: <http://www.bhfactive.org.uk/>

## Did You Know?



### Differences Between Boys & Girls:

From as early as 3 years old, girls and boys differ in their activity patterns. The HOPP Study shows that girls tend to be less active and take longer breaks between activities. Being aware that girls may need a little extra encouragement is the first step towards getting them moving and keeping them active.