Physical Activity for Your Child: Ages 3, 4, & 5 Years

Daily physical activity is important for your child’s physical and mental development. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and leading health and fitness organizations all agree that children age 2 and older need at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day for good health. Children can reach this goal by being active for 10 minutes 6 times throughout the day, 15 minutes 4 times a day, or any other combinations of active time periods that brings the total to 60 minutes or more for the day.

Motor milestones
Motor milestones are movement skills that most children are capable of doing at a given age. Most children ages 3 through 5 years have the muscle strength and coordination to develop the skills listed below. These milestones are general guidelines. Your child might achieve these skills a little earlier or a little later than other children. A great way to help your child develop these skills is to do them with your child in a fun and playful way.

**Milestones for 3-year olds:**
- Change speed, direction, or type of movement beam at a signal
- Throw object without losing balance
- Hop briefly
- Catch a large or bounced ball with both arms extended
- Walk straight line on low balance beam
- Run on tiptoes
- Gallop
- Use alternate feet to go up stairs
- Jump to floor from 1 foot height
- Do a forward somersault

**Milestones for 4-year olds:**
- Start, stop, turn, & move easily around things
- Throw with basic over arm movement
- Bounce a ball
- Catch by trapping ball to chest
- Lift using proper form: straight back, head up, legs doing the work
- Hop on non-dominant foot
- Jump over objects 5-to-6 inches high
- Skips, sometimes on one side only
- Do a backward somersault
- Go down stairs with alternate feet

**Milestones for 5-year olds:**
- Slide
- Catch a thrown ball with hands
- Skip using alternate feet

Ways to be active with your child ages 3, 4, & 5 years

Fun with scarves: Gather a few silk or lightweight scarves (or cut 18-inch squares of toile fabric), turn on some music and let the fun begin! Dance with the scarves, waving them in the air. Toss a scarf in the air and try to catch in. Toss and clap (or other action) before catching it. Toss a scarf to each other. Toss it in front of you and run to catch it. Toss it with one hand, catch it with the other. Toss it and try to catch it on a body part, like your head or shoulder.
Obstacle course: Inside or outside, use objects to jump over (shoebox, foam noodle, rope), climb over (chair), crawl under (table), crawl through (large box tunnel), and jump off (milk crate or small step stool). Have your child try different ways of moving...tiptoeing, hopping, running from one object to another. Make special spots for throwing or kicking a ball, or jumping in place a certain number of times. Or, make an obstacle course for a tricycle using plastic cones or large plastic cups, rope, chalk, or other objects to mark off a winding path.

Imitate animal movements: See how many different animals you and your child can imitate. Some ideas for starters: little hops like bunnies, big hops like kangaroos, walk like a penguin, walk on all fours like our 4-legged animal friends, gallop, fly like a bird, stomp like a dinosaur

Storybook Acting: Look for books that you can read and act out with your child. Some examples: Babar's Yoga for Elephants by Laurent de Brunhoff, Bearobics: A Hip-Hop Counting Story by Vic Parker, My Daddy is a Pretzel: Yoga for Parents and Kids by Baron Baptiste, Shake My Sillies Out illus. by David Allender, The Bouncing, Dancing, Galloping ABC by Charlotte Doyle, We've All Got Bellybuttons! by David Martin, Yoga Class by Uma Krishnaswami

Other tips to support an active lifestyle:
- Make sure your child has a pair of well-fitting sneakers with bendable (not stiff) soles.
- Explore different parks. Call Lancaster General Wellness Center at 717-544-3811 for a free copy of Lancaster on the Move!, a guide to parks and other free or low cost recreation opportunities in Lancaster County. Be active with your child at the park. Supervise for safety.
- Limit screen time (TV, computer, hand-held games, etc.) to no more than 2 hours a day.
- When buying toys, choose more often age-appropriate toys that promote active play, like tricycles, balls, cones (for making obstacle courses), etc.
- Make time for your whole family to be active together...play! Block out time on your calendar. Try different activities and make a handy list your family favorites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indoor activities</th>
<th>Outdoor activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>5.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References and Resources