

introduction to physical activity

Early childhood is a great time for your preschoolers to be active. This is when they enjoy learning to run, jump, climb and play ball. By making time for children to be active, you can encourage them to enjoy physical activity.

what is physical activity?

Physical activity includes:

- Endurance – activities that strengthen the heart and lungs such as running, jumping and swimming
- Flexibility – activities that encourage children to bend, stretch and reach such as gymnastics and dancing
- Strength – activities that build strong muscles and bones such as climbing or swinging across a playground ladder

How much physical activity do preschoolers need?

Throughout every day, preschoolers should get at least 120 minutes of physical activity. This includes:

- 60 minutes of structured physical activity
- AND
- 60 minutes of unstructured physical activity

What is structured physical activity?

- Organized games and activities
- Time to develop movement skills
- A chance to learn to play with others

What is unstructured physical activity?

- Supervised time to play actively (alone or with other children)
- Time where children decide what to do and how to do it
- Indoor or outdoor activity


Adapted from the American National Association for Sport and Physical Education publication **Active start: A statement of physical activity guidelines for children birth to five years, 2002.*

physical activities for preschoolers

As children grow between the ages 3 and 5, their movement skills and abilities develop too. For example, climbing stairs for a 3-year-old is holding the rail and stepping two feet on each stair. Climbing stairs for a 5-year-old is quickly bounding up the stairs. Children grow and develop at different rates and their physical abilities are just as different. It is important to plan activities that fit the different abilities and interests of your preschool children.

for preschool children, physical activity is

- Walking, running and playing Catch Me If You Can
- Throwing a ball and running to get it
- Doing a funky dance to music
- Rolling around on the floor
- Jumping over the cracks on the sidewalk
- Climbing the ladder and going down the slide
- Trying to balance when walking on a curb
- Jumping up and down and back and forth
- Wrestling with Mom or Dad in the living room
- Learning to ride a bike



Get active. In a heartbeat. Try this out – ask children to put their hand over their heart and see if they can feel it beat. Ask them to jump up and down or hop around the room for a few minutes. Then, ask children to check their heartbeat again. Their heartbeat should be easier to feel because they have just put it to work and it is working harder. Activity can help make their heart stronger.

parade day

goal

To build endurance with walking, marching and dancing. To build flexibility with stretching and reaching.

supplies – provided

- Parade Day cards: Drummer, Baton Twirler, Flag Bearer, Clown (two cards), Dancer, Band Leader, Trumpet Player, Flutist, Saxophonist, Juggler, Acrobat

optional

- Music – can be anything that maintains a steady beat. Make your own music by clapping your hands or stomping your feet.
- Instruments – children can use available instruments or use their imagination with toys and household items.

warm-up

Hop. Hop. Stop. (Hop up and down and then stop.)

Hop. Hop. Stop.

Run a little. Run a little. (Run in place.)

Sit down PLOP! (Sit down.)

how to play

- Give children roles in the parade by having them pick a card out of a hat or handing them out.
- Let the children practice their roles. Children should use their imagination. Give them the opportunity to create a movement on their own, and then offer suggestions if they need them.
 - Flag bearer – hold a flag nice and high, waving it slightly side to side.
 - Drummer – beat a pretend drum from the side.

- Baton twirler – throw an imaginary baton in the air, twirling, spinning and catching the baton. Dance!
- Juggler – pretend to throw balls up in the air and catch them.
- Marching band – includes trumpet players, trombone players and other musicians. Have them walk single file while playing their instrument.
- Clown – skip around the other children, act goofy, and pretend to shake hands with the crowd.
- Acrobat – spin, jump and roll around.
- Dancers – dance any way the child wants.
- Band leader – lead the parade around the room.
- Start the music and parade around the room. Add clapping, marching or stomping.

alternatives

- Have the parade outside; go around the block or the backyard.
- Get them to go faster, or slow down; try slow motion.
- Have each child introduce themselves to the group with the name of their role in the parade and their action.
- Create instruments or props during craft time.

modifications

Younger children – you can be the leader of the parade. Show a role in the parade, and have the children copy your actions. Show all the different roles. Then allow them to pick their favourite one and start the parade.

Older children – encourage marching to the beat and clapping with the music.

120 minutes of physical activity every day is what it takes to keep preschoolers happy and healthy.

charades

goal

To get the children moving by acting as different animals, actions, objects or people.

supplies – provided

Charades cards

- Animals – rabbit, horse, duck, seal, dog, monkey, frog, snake, cow, pig, bird, elephant, cat, turtle
- Actions – throwing a baseball, playing basketball, bicycling, playing with a hula hoop, flying a kite, skipping
- Objects – car, spinning top, airplane, roller coaster, sprinkler
- People – robot, Santa Claus, nurse, doctor, fireman

It's always fun to pretend. Build time into your day for children to play, explore and make believe. Active minds need active bodies.

how to play

- Have one child pick one of the cards (without looking).
- Provide help or hints on how to act it out if the child is unsure.
- Have the child act out the card (silently).
- If the children are unable to guess the animal/object/person, allow the child to make sounds, but without using words.
- Once the animal/object/person has been guessed, allow another child to be the actor and pick a new card.

cool-down

*I wiggle my fingers, I wiggle my toes.
I wiggle my shoulders, I wiggle my nose.
Now the wiggles are out of me, and I'm
just as still as I can be.*

adaptations

Outdoors – this game can be played outside on a nice day with a wide-open space.

Indoors – after the item on the card has been identified correctly, have all the children act out that animal/object/action/person and give them space to move about the room.

modifications

Younger children – join in the activity by acting out the card with the child. Use only the simple cards included and not the more difficult ones.

Older children – make “animals” the category. Allow the children to decide for themselves which animal they want to act out.

If you have a large group of children, place them in groups of two or three so children get more of an opportunity to be the actor.

happy forest

goal

To have the children stretch tall like trees. Children will also be encouraged to jump, dance and be active.

warm-up/cool-down

Trees

Elm trees stretch and stretch so wide,
(Extend arms out to sides.)

Their limbs reach out on every side.
(Stretch.)

Pine trees stretch and stretch so high,
(Extend arms upward.)

They nearly reach up to the sky.
(Stretch.)

Willows droop and droop so low,
(Arms hang loosely down.)

Their branches sweep the ground below.
(Fingers sweep the floor.)

how to play

- Children stand still and stretch tall as if they were trees.
- One person is the “funny forest keeper” and walks around and tries to make the “tree” children laugh. Encourage the funny forest keeper(s) to jump, dance, sing and be active while being funny. They cannot touch the other children.
- Once a tree laughs, they join the other child and become a funny forest keeper.
- Keep playing until all the trees are laughing.

alternative

Outdoors – this game can easily be played outside in a wide-open space.

modifications

Younger children – join the activity as the first funny forest keeper. This will encourage other children to follow your lead.

Older children – challenge the funny forest keeper to make the trees laugh, just through actions, without any sound.

Monkey see. Monkey do. Children will watch and learn from you.

exploring the enchanted forest

goal

To add physical activity (endurance, strength and flexibility) to story time.

supplies – optional

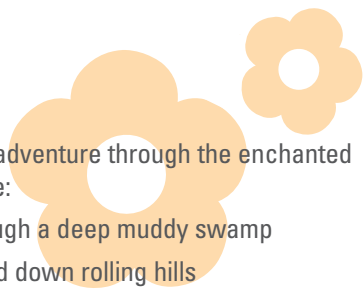
- String, cord or skipping rope
- Duct tape or masking tape
- Blanket
- Boxes and chairs
- Flashlight

warm-up

*Around and about, around and about,
Over and under, and in and out.
Run through the meadow, swim in the sea,
Slide down a mountain, climb up a tree!*

how to play

- Create a play area that is a swamp, hobbit countryside or enchanted forest. Use the supplies you have to help make this scene. For example:
 - Lay out the skipping rope like a log on the ground to walk along
 - Make circles from tape or string to be creeks, lakes or mud puddles
 - Use four chairs covered in a blanket to be a cave
- Pick a starting point for the trip and explain to the children that they will be walking through the area. They should be aware of creek crossings, log bridges, stepping stones and caves.

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- Ideas for an adventure through the enchanted forest include:
 - Walk through a deep muddy swamp
 - Run up and down rolling hills
 - Climb a tree, reaching up high for the next branch
 - Roll down a hill
 - Climb a steep mountain
 - Jump over rain puddles
 - Carry your heavy backpack along a hiking trail
 - Skate/swim across the lake
 - Tiptoe through quicksand
 - Crawl under prickly bushes, staying low to the ground

alternative

Outdoors – use real obstacles outside!
Use playground equipment but pretend
that it is an enchanted forest.

modification

Older children – have one child lead around
the obstacles and play Follow the Leader
around the imaginary forest.

Dance like no one's watching. Twist and Shout. Get down. Get funky.
Get active with the kids.

contact colour

goal

To give children a chance to build endurance by moving around for an extended period of time.

supplies – needed

- Coloured pieces of paper

warm-up songs

- **Head and Shoulders** – have children point to body parts while singing.

*Head and shoulders, knees and toes,
Knees and toes, knees and toes.
Head and shoulders, knees and toes,
Eyes, ears, mouth and nose.*

Sing it again with large, over-exaggerated actions.

- **Hokey Pokey** – have children do actions.

*You put your left foot in,
you put your left foot out,
You put your left foot in
and you shake it all about.
You do the Hokey Pokey
and you turn yourself around.
That's what it's all about. (Clap, Clap.)*

Repeat the song with right foot, left hand, right hand, head, arm, etc.

Sing it again with large, over-exaggerated actions.

how to play

- Review colours and body parts with the children. Do this by using the songs *Head and Shoulders* and *Hokey Pokey* and by reviewing the Body Parts and Colours lists below.
- Scatter coloured paper around the room (on the floor, on a chair, high on the wall, etc.).
- Next, pick a colour from the colour list and a body part from the body part list (lists included below). Tell the children your picks, for example, Blue and Elbow.
- Each child will then run to the blue pieces of paper, and put their elbow on the blue paper. Remind children that they can share pieces of paper.
- Repeat with different colours and body parts until the children are ready for a stretch and water break.

alternatives

Outdoors – bring the coloured paper outside and play in an open field, on a playground or in any large space.

To work on balance and muscle endurance, have the children hold the position while everyone sings a song.

modifications

Younger children – focus on the three primary colours: blue, yellow and red.

Older children – expand the list of colours. Write the name of each colour on the coloured paper to help children read the names.

body parts to call out

- Hand
- Head
- Elbow
- Shoulder
- Knee
- Foot
- Big Toe
- Nose
- Back
- Thumb
- Little Finger

colours to call out

- Red
- Orange
- Yellow
- Green
- Blue
- Purple
- Pink



It's nice outside. Red Rover, Red Rover,
the great outdoors is calling you over.

musical blanket

goal

To get children running around and increasing their endurance.

supplies – needed

- Towels, blankets, mats or carpets
- Music

how to play

- Lay blankets, towels, mats or carpets on the floor, across the room.
- Have children dance and run around the room while the music is playing.
- When the music stops, children run and sit on a towel, sharing if necessary.
- Take away the smallest blanket/ towel. Start the music and marching again.

- Stop the music and have children run and sit again.
- Keep removing the smallest blanket/ towel until all children are sharing one.

cool-down

(Add actions to words.)

*My hands upon my head I place
On my shoulders, on my face
On my knees and at my side,
then behind me they will hide.*

*Then I raise them up SO high,
'till they almost reach the sky.*

Swiftly count them – 1, 2, 3. (Bring arms down slowly and place them in lap.)

And see how quiet they can be.

alternatives

Outdoors – use picnic blankets or beach towels, depending on your location. If you don't have music, sing!

Play with different instructions such as: have a partner, hop on one foot or walk backwards.

modification

Older children – encourage them to clap along with the music or to march to the beat.

Take your singing out of the shower. Hit the high notes with a few tunes and get the kids moving to a different beat.

twist, shake and groove

goal

To get the children active with a fun dance.

supplies

- Music with a good beat

how to play

- Make enough room to dance and start the music.
- Be the leader of the dance, and encourage the children to copy you in trying out the following dance moves:
 - Sprinkler – have one arm bent, hand touching the shoulder. The other arm is straight ahead. Have the bent arm swing towards the straight arm, out and in. You're a human sprinkler.
 - Jackhammer – make fists, knuckles up. Put fist side by side at waist level; quickly move fists up and down (small movements).

- Raise the roof – have hands above the head, palms up and pretend to push up and down in time with the music. You can also push the walls (move hands to the sides) and the floor (move hands to knee level and push down).
- Churn the Butter – hold fists close to the chest and then make a large circle.
- Dig a hole – pretend to be holding a shovel, put the shovel in the ground, lift some dirt and throw it over the shoulder, and then wipe your forehead.
- Do the twist – keep your legs together and twist, bending at the knees and hips down to the floor, and back up again.
- The monkey – keep your arms out in front of you with fists. Alternate pumping the arms up and down, keeping them straight, and act like a monkey.

cool-down song

Stretch, Stretch, Stretch Your Arms
(Tune of Row, Row, Row Your Boat)

*Stretch, stretch, stretch your arms,
High above your head.
Stretch so high, reach the sky,
And then we'll stretch again. (Repeat)*

alternative

Take turns having children be the leader of the dance, if they want.

Kids can have their energy zapped easily. Short breaks for water and a little rest will recharge their batteries so they can get back to playing.

pigs fly

goal

To have the children participate in physical activity while pretending to be different animals.

supplies – provided

- List of animals, birds and reptiles

how to play

- Face the group and call out an animal from the list below. For example, “Ducks fly.”
- When the animal/bird/reptile named is one that flies, the children flap their arms. When the animal named doesn’t fly, they do not flap their arms.

- Pick another animal from the list. For example, “Horses fly.” As the leader, you fly to everything. Children should not flap their arms because horses don’t fly.
- This can be a chance to teach children about new animals. You can call out the names of uncommon animals and insects. A lot of the children will not know if they can fly or not.

cool-down

Can you hop like a rabbit?
Can you jump like a frog?
Can you walk like a duck?
Can you run like a dog?
Can you fly like a bird?
Can you swim like a fish?
And be still like a child as still as this?

alternatives

This game can easily be played outside.

Have the children imitate different types of animals. For example, pretend that you are in a jungle and imitate jungle animals, or imitate farm animals or animals that could be pets. See the lists below.

Use the cards from the Charades activity (page 8) and show pictures of different animals.

modifications

Younger children – focus on more common animals.

Older children – encourage them to tell you what animals you might find on a farm or in a jungle. Ask them to use their imagination.

list of animals to use for “pigs fly” activity

Animals that fly

Mammal – bat

Birds – duck, chicken, goose, bluejay, owl, hawk, pelican, condor

Insects – mosquito, bumblebee, butterfly

Animals that might be pets – parrot/bird

Animals that don't fly

Mammals – horse, cow, pig, cat, dog, monkey, elephant, lion, zebra, orangutan, mouse, hamster, rabbit, guinea pig

Birds – ostrich, emu, kiwi, penguin

Reptiles – snake, gecko

Other animals for alternative games

Jungle animals – lion, elephant, giraffe, hippopotamus, zebra

Farm animals – horse, cow, sheep, pig, chicken

Animals that might be pets – dog, cat, rabbit, turtle, hamster

Turn off the TV and channel your energy. Go from a couch potato right into a game of hot potato.

grocery shopping dance-along

goal

To get the children active with a fun dance.

supplies – optional but encouraged

- Music with a good beat and, if possible, one without singing

how to play

- Ask the children if they've ever gone grocery shopping before. Explain that now they are going to grocery shop with music and dancing.
- Make enough room for the children to move around. Start the music.

- Give cues and actions, making a story about going to the grocery store. As the leader, be sure to stay active and encourage lots of movement. Some suggested actions:
 - Drive to the grocery store
 - Get your shopping cart
 - Grab some tomatoes
 - Pick up some bananas
 - Get some eggs; be careful not to break them
 - Lift up a carton of milk; watch, it's heavy
 - Don't forget cereal
 - Reach for a can of beans
 - Unload the cart
 - Pay the cashier
 - Load it into the car
 - Drive home

alternatives

You can use this exercise to introduce *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating* by encouraging the children to pick healthy foods.

Ask the children what items they want to put into their imaginary grocery cart.

Getting kids to grocery shop with you can help to show them healthy foods and build their shopping skills.