



Are Your Children Physically Active?

Having healthy habits in childhood; being active and having a varied and nutritionally balanced diet is important to long term health outcomes, well into adulthood.

A lack of regular activity and a high body fat in children has been shown in studies to cause a range of physical, social and mental health problems. Overweight and inactive children are more likely to be overweight into adulthood, and risk developing diseases such as type 2 diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular diseases.

The Ministry of Health reports that in New Zealand, 31% of children aged 2-14 years are overweight and this trend has been on the rise in recent years. Internationally the World Health Organisation reports that 42 million under the age of 5 are overweight (2103 figures).

We face a unique moment in history; most of the world's population lives in countries where overweight and obesity kills more people than underweight.

For parents and those who have an interest in the future health of their children, it is clear that a lifelong healthy lifestyle needs to start in childhood, and as it is adults who make the health decisions for children, we have a real opportunity to turn around the health of our children. By encouraging and supporting them to get active and engaging in healthy eating when they are young, we can make it easier to maintain those habits into adulthood.

It's not just about the health risks either. Getting kids active helps them with their physical development helping to build strong bones, muscles and joints, and a healthy heart and lungs. It will improve their balance, coordination and cognitive skills, and it will help them be more confident and socially interactive.

Sport New Zealand states that early childhood experiences are critical to the development of the skills, attitudes and confidence required to become an active participant in sport and recreation in later life.

While physical activity and childhood goes together more and more, there is competition for getting active. Nearly half of children aged 5–14 years (53 percent) usually watch two or more hours of television a day, and this time increases into the teen years. This means we cannot just assume kids will stay active. Just as we plan time to exercise and engage in physical activity, our kids need to plan for it as well.

So let's get our nation's children active.

There are plenty of ways you can integrate activity into family life with young children.

- Limit screen time
- Whenever possible use active transport
- Involve your children in your activity and exercise choices. While it may not be appropriate to take your pre-schooler to the gym, they can come along for active family activities. The earlier they are exposed to regular exercise and activity, the better for their long term health.
- Get the kids to help around the house and garden, and teach them that working up a sweat is a positive thing.

Once kids head into teenage years and beyond, there's no reason they can't enjoy exercise in the way we do. While sporty kids will continue getting active that way, but for those who prefer to work at their own pace, many exercise facilities and trainers offer student rates that mean you can set your teenager up with safe and effective exercise advice.

We are fortunate in New Zealand to have a nationwide network of REPs (NZ Register of Exercise Professionals) registered exercise facilities and exercise professionals who have the appropriate knowledge and skill to help get your children, and in fact the whole family active. They will develop exercise advice based on the *NZ Guidelines for Children in Exercise Facilities* which were developed with input from ACC, Ministry of Education and the Childrens Commissioner.

They can also provide you with a copy of the REPs Tell Me More information brochure called *Children and Exercise* which provides useful information on getting children active.

So why not take your children along to an exercise session with you?

References

<http://www.srknowledge.org.nz/research-completed/thevalue-of-sport-and-recreation-to-new-zealand/>
<http://www.sportnz.org.nz/get-into-sport-for-parents/>
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs311/en/>
<http://www.cph.co.nz/Files/ChildObesityPreventionLitReview.pdf>

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Who is the NZ Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs)?

REPs is an independent non profit organisation administrating the New Zealand exercise professionals register to ensure that the public receive safe and effective exercise advice. Using REPs Registered Exercise Professionals is the "Warrant of Fitness Check" that exercise professionals and facilities meet New Zealand and internationally benchmarked standards to deliver exercise advice and instruction. REPs is affiliated globally to other national exercise professional registers representing over 210,000 exercise professionals through the International Confederation of Registers for Exercise Professionals (ICREPs) - www.icreps.org

