Physical Activity for Your Teen: Ages 13 through 18 Years

Daily physical activity is important for your teen’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 teens need at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day for good health. Teens can reach this goal by being active for 10 minutes 6 times throughout the day, 15 minutes 4 times a day, or any other combination of active time periods that totals 60 minutes or more for the day. Encourage a variety of activities to help your teen reap the most health benefits and to reduce the chance of burnout from any one activity. However, the best activities are those that your teen enjoys and does regularly and safely.

Major types of physical activity

**Moderate-to-vigorous intensity activity:** makes your heart beat faster and your breathing harder, may also make you sweat. Examples are brisk walking, hiking, bicycling, lap swimming, martial arts training, rollerskating, iceskating, horseback riding, shoveling snow, jumping rope, jogging, running, dancing, and wall climbing; sports like basketball, baseball, softball, volleyball, soccer, hockey, tennis, football, and wrestling; and games like tag, badminton, and wall ball.

**Strength building exercise:** uses resistance to make specific muscles work harder to move, making them stronger and more efficient. Over time, as the muscles get stronger, a progressive increase in the resistance is necessary in order to further increase muscle strength. Teens can use their own body weight as resistance and build the strength of certain muscles by doing exercises like abdominal curl ups, push ups, and side leg lifts. Teens who want to use hand held weights, strength training machines, and elastic resistance bands should obtain help from a certified strength conditioning specialist (CSCS) who is knowledgeable and experienced in strength training for teens. In general, teens should start with small hand held weights with high repetitions (15-20) and wait until Tanner stage 5 to use heavier weights with fewer repetitions. Heavy weight training, bodybuilding and powerlifting are not recommended for teens.

**Stretching & flexibility exercise:** involves stretching muscles and ligaments in order to improve the flexibility of those muscles and the joints to which the muscles are attached. Examples are yoga, tai chi, Pilates, and general stretching exercises.

**Activities of daily living and other low intensity recreational activities:** include walking in your home, to/from school, and at school, up/down steps, walking the dog, doing chores, yard work, golfing, fishing, etc. Increasing the frequency, intensity (how much effort you exert), and/or the duration (length of time) you do these types of activity can increase their health benefit.

Age-Appropriate Goals

- Fine tune basic skills
- For organized sports, increase focus on team work, strategy, more complex movements
- Begin or continue strength training with guidance and close supervision
- Personal fitness goals in the area of aerobic fitness, muscular strength/endurance, flexibility
Avoid activities with high risk of serious injury

For safety reasons, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the following:

- **All-terrain vehicles** (2-, 3-, and 4-wheeled unlicensed motor vehicles) should not be used by children under 16 years old.
- **Trampolines** should never be used at home.

Other tips to support an active lifestyle:

- Limit screen time (TV, computer, hand-held games, etc.) to no more than 2 hours a day, with the exception of physically active programs like Dance Dance Revolution (DDR) and exercise DVDs by certified instructors with degrees in physical education or exercise physiology.
- Make sure your teen has a pair of proper fitting sneakers or sport-specific footwear.
- Keep sporting equipment organized and easy to reach.
- When buying gifts, choose active games and age-appropriate fitness equipment, like bicycles, rollerblades, balls, bats, mitts, jump ropes, exercise CDs and DVDs, and frisbees.
- Make sure your teen wears protective sports gear appropriate for the activity, like a helmet, knee/elbow pads, mouth guard, protective eyewear (like rec specs), shin guards, etc. Remember sunscreen for skin protection.
- Seek medical advice if your teen has any activity-related injury. Getting help sooner rather than later might allow a quicker return to activity.
- Be an advocate for high quality physical education in your teen’s school.
- Explore different parks. Offer to take your teen’s friends along. 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.
- Find activities that you enjoy and can do regularly to set a good example for your teen.
- Make time for your whole family to be active together. Schedule it, if that’s the only way to ensure it. Try different activities and make a handy list of ones that your family really enjoys.

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References and Resources

2. American Academy of Pediatrics Web site, [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org); click on Health Topics and choose Physical activity for links to numerous resources
7. Collage Videos Web site: [www.collagevideo.com](http://www.collagevideo.com), extensive list of exercise CDs and DVDs (Check instructor credentials; they are not equally qualified), both online and paper catalog available