

PROMOTING HEALTHY PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT IN YOUR CHILD

A child's growth flows as a continuous process, a gradual move from one stage of development to another. For example, one must walk before they can run. Physical development refers to a child's ability to move, coordinate and control their body. This development can be broken up into two categories: gross motor skills and fine motor skills. Gross motor skills refer to controlling large parts of the body; arms and legs. Fine motor skills refer to coordinating small body parts; hands and fingers. Parents can foster healthy growth by providing opportunities to practice new skills, as well as promoting healthy eating habits during these important childhood years.

Parents are very busy managing different needs of the people around them; specifically the needs of their children. The activities mentioned below are simple, inexpensive and can be adapted for various family members:

- Provide a play environment that encourages lots of time and space for energetic and noisy play;
- Stretch out body parts. Stretch and gently wiggle your toes, feet, legs, arms, and fingers. Gently stretch your neck by looking side to side and up and down;
- Set aside family time for a hike, walk, or visit to a nearby park. Play games that involve running, hopping, throwing and catching together;
- When playing ball, ask the child to use alternate feet for kicking or alternate hands for batting. Make sure the ball is large enough to promote success, yet small enough to present a challenge;
- Discourage inactivity by limiting TV viewing and video/computer game playing to less than two hours a day;
- Try rolling games. How many different ways can we roll? Slow and fast rolls, arms at side, or one arm up and one arm down;
- Invite children to help with dish washing.

In regards to healthy nutrition, the Institute of Medicine, Food and Nutrition Board, and Board on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention all suggest:

Parents can serve as role models by introducing new foods in a persistent but noncoercive fashion. Studies show that repeated exposure is most critical during the early years of life and that it can take five to ten exposures to a new food before a child will accept it. In addition, parents should consider smaller portion sizes, encourage children to stop eating when they feel full, and avoid using food as a reward. Parents also should stock their homes with healthy products, particularly fruits and vegetables, to encourage their kids to choose them as snacks.

Remember when providing these activities or healthy foods, it is vital that they be presented in a positive, cheerful way. The key is to promote a healthy view on physical development for a child.