



EXERCISING as a FAMILY

Mike Clarke, Physical Instructor



Exercising should be enjoyable – variety is the key. This also aides to combat the shorter attention spans observed with most kids.

Kids need regular exercise too – a perfect excuse to have quality time together and the whole family benefits health-wise. In hand with the shortened attention span, are the short bursts of intense energy – the run around then drop to sleep scenario! To ensure a tired but happy child, plan short periods of physical activity rather than sustained periods such as long mountain hikes. Too long and Mum or Dad ends up carrying their child home or dealing with “scratchiness” for the one to two recovery days!

For the under fives a general play in the park on the swings and slides is more than enough to achieve enjoyable activity. During the more unpredictable weather months any opportunity to get out of the house will benefit Mum, Dad and kids. At times this may be a quick walk around the house or up and down the road between showers.

Remember, the little ones are not as big and strong so will require more regular rest and refueling (water) opportunities than adults.

BENEFITS of exercise

The whole family can benefit from regular exercise – Mums and Dads, you can help your kids to achieve this. A physically active child will benefit in the following ways:

- STRONGER** muscles and bones
- LEANER** body as exercise assists the regulation of body fat
- THEREFORE**, reduced risk of becoming overweight
- REDUCED** risk of developing Type Two Diabetes
- ASSISTS** with reducing risk of high blood pressure and blood cholesterol levels
- TEND** to have more positive outlook on life
- BETTER** sleep patterns
- GREATER** ability to manage physical and emotional challenges that get thrown their way (Maybe running for a bus, studying for exams, even bending down to tie a shoe lace).

THREE elements of fitness

If you have watched children on a playground, you will have seen the three elements of fitness in action – Endurance, Strength, and Flexibility.

Endurance – eg a child runs from their friend (tiggly/tag). Aerobic exercise. Endurance develops with regular engagement in aerobic activity. During aerobic exercises the heart beats faster, the breathing rate increases and becomes harder.

Regular and continuous periods of aerobic activity will strengthen the heart (muscle) and improve the body’s ability to deliver oxygenated blood around the body. Remember, keep it fun for the whole family!

Other aerobic activity ideas include: basketball, cycling, soccer or just kicking a ball around, swimming, tennis, walking, jogging, running and playing with a frisbee. If you are on the farm – shifting stock and chasing sheep is a great activity.

Some Helpful Tips:

HELP your child participate in a variety of activities that are age / developmentally appropriate.

ESTABLISH a routine or exercise schedule with regular physical activity.

INCORPORATE activity into daily routines such as taking the stairs instead of the lift or parking the car and walking (on long drives take turns walking with the kids beside the car – where road and traffic permit).

EMBRACE a healthier lifestyle yourself – be that positive role model.

AND KEEP it interesting then they'll come back for more without you feeling like you have to nag. You don't have to stick within the family all the time. Inclusion of friends, especially if organised, can offer variety itself.



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Flexibility – eg child bending, stretching, reaching to bars on tip toe. Stretching exercises help improve flexibility, allowing muscles and joints to move more easily through their full range of motion. Everyday activities such as reaching out for something, practising the splits, rolling or flipping over the arms of the couch provide great stretching opportunities for kids.

HOW MUCH exercise should we do with KIDS?

The percentage of children who are medically considered overweight has more than doubled in the past 30 years. Although there are many factors contributing to this “epidemic”, kids are more sedentary now than ever before, ie spending more time sitting in front of the computer, TV, play-station, and even on the phone.

As with any inactive person, exercise needs to be built up gradually so it’s much easier to encourage the continuation of activity from a young age while a child is naturally being active in play.

Unless sleeping, it is important to remember that young children should not be inactive for prolonged periods – no more than one hour. For school-aged children this should be no longer than two hours. To help with this, parents can place time limits on sedentary activities such as playing video games and watching TV.

RAISING a Fit KID

Combining regular physical activity with a healthy diet is the key to a healthy lifestyle. By understanding the importance of being physically active, you can instil fun and healthy habits that will last a lifetime. Remember, as a parent you are the role model!

In New Zealand we are fortunate to have unlimited free access to many recreational reserves, parks and activities – get out there and get using them!

Thanks for the great response. Keep the questions coming in to mike@befit.co.nz.

Strength – eg child pulls themselves up and along the monkey bars. This does not mean everyone needs to invest in gym memberships to lift weights. Though with experienced adult supervision, some children achieve great benefits from specific gym/weight training programmes. For most kids the push-ups, pull-ups and other muscle strengthening and toning exercises occur naturally in children’s play – climbing, wrestling, handstands.

A general GUIDELINE of current recommendations for CHILDREN.

Age	Min. Daily Activity	Comments
Infant	No specific requirements	Physical activity should encourage motor development.
Toddler	1 – 1.5 hours	30 mins planned physical activity and 60 mins unstructured physical activity (or free play).
Preschooler	2 hours	60 mins planned physical activity and 60 mins unstructured or free play.
School Age	1 hour or more	Divide into periods of approximately 15 mins.