

Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour in Children and Youth

A Guide for Physicians

Physicians play an important role in helping children and youth lead healthy lives. This tool provides a snapshot of the Canadian guidelines for healthy active living and strategies to incorporate them into your practice.



Counselling patients: Do, Ask, Share!

Every office visit is an opportunity to help families incorporate healthy active living into their daily routine.

DO

- Write a “physical activity” prescription that families can use at home.
- Calculate and plot BMI once a year.
- Always focus on health-promoting messages, as opposed to weight.
- Encourage parents to be role models by being active themselves.
- Be a role model: advocate to ensure that physical activity is available and accessible in your community.

A healthy, active clinic

- Put up posters in exam/waiting room
- Provide guidelines
- Post information about local activities, recreational programs
- Provide pedometers

ASK

- How much time does the family spend on sedentary activities? On physical activity?
- What activities does the family enjoy? Motivational interviewing techniques may help.
- What are the barriers to doing more physical activity? Work with families to find solutions to the things that prevent them from being more active.

Healthy active living is important for children and youth of all shapes and sizes, including those with **chronic health conditions**. CPS has specific recommendations to help.

SHARE

- Provide families with the Canadian guidelines for physical activity and sedentary behaviour.
- Provide information about safety and protective equipment (e.g., bike helmets, personal flotation devices).
- Offer ideas for overcoming barriers to healthy active living.
- Provide educational materials (visit www.cps.ca/active-kids for resources).

Motivational interviewing is a patient-centered, goal-oriented, evidence-based counselling method. It combines supportive and empathetic counselling and helps motivate patients. It can be useful in encouraging lifestyle changes. Visit www.cps.ca/active-kids for more details.





Canadian guidelines for physical activity and sedentary behaviour

	Physical activity	Sedentary behaviour
Early years (0–4 years)	<p><i>Infants (< 1 year)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physically active several times daily — particularly through interactive floor-based play <p><i>Toddlers and preschoolers (1–4 years)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accumulate ≥ 180 minutes of physical activity <i>at any intensity</i> throughout the day Progress towards ≥ 60 minutes of energetic play daily by 5 years 	<p>Minimize sedentary time (e.g., prolonged sitting > 1 hour at a time)</p> <p><i>Children < 2 years:</i> Screen time is not recommended</p> <p><i>Children 2–4 years:</i> Limit screen time to < 1 hour/day; less is better</p>
Children and youth (5–17 years)	<p>Accumulate ≥ 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity daily, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vigorous-intensity activities (≥ 3 days/week) Activities that strengthen muscle and bone (≥ 3 days/week) 	<p>Minimize sedentary time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limit recreational screen time to ≤ 2 hours/day Limit sedentary (motorized) transport, extended sitting time, time indoors

Physical activity: Any body movement that works muscles using more than resting energy (e.g., free play, structured activities, activities of daily living).

Sedentary behaviour: Behaviours associated with low energy expenditure, such as prolonged sitting or lounging in transit or at school, home or leisure (e.g., constrained in stroller or high chair, TV viewing, computer use, video games, car transportation).

Moderate-intensity physical activity: Causes the child/youth to sweat a little and breathe harder (e.g., bike riding, playground activities).

Vigorous-intensity physical activity: Causes child/youth to sweat and be 'out of breath' (e.g., running, swimming).

Source: Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP). Canadian physical activity and sedentary behaviour guidelines handbook. Ottawa, ON: CSEP. 2012. www.csep.ca

Promote a holistic approach

With many patients, increasing physical activity is likely just one of a number of strategies you recommend for good health. Healthy active living is a comprehensive approach that involves:

- Being physically active
- Minimizing sedentary behaviour
- Making healthy choices about food and drink
- Developing good sleeping habits
- Feeling good about oneself

The CPS has developed a **Prescription for healthy active kids** that allows you to work with families to set goals on all these fronts.

For resources and other strategies on incorporating all these messages into your practice, visit www.cps.ca/active-kids.

Counselling patients: How to implement the guidelines

Offer parents specific examples of how to increase physical activity and reduce sedentary behaviour. Work with them to find activities and strategies that match their interests and lifestyle.

	Early years (0–4 years)	Children (5–11 years)	Youth (12–17 years)
What being active means	<p><i>Infants (< 1 year)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tummy time • Reaching for or grasping balls or other toys • Playing or rolling on the floor • Crawling around the home <p><i>Toddlers/preschoolers (1–4 years)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any kind of movement (e.g., climbing stairs, crawling, walking) 	<p>Starting at 5 years, activities should be more intense:</p> <p><i>Moderate-intensity physical activities</i> include: bike riding, playground activities, skateboarding, brisk walking, hiking, canoeing, baseball and softball.</p> <p><i>Vigorous-intensity physical activities</i> include: running, swimming, aerobics, basketball, vigorous dancing, ice or field hockey.</p> <p><i>Activities that strengthen muscle and bone</i> include: games like hopscotch, tag, and jumping rope; sports such as gymnastics, basketball, volleyball, tennis; push-ups; swinging on playground equipment or bars; climbing ropes, walls or trees; running.</p>	
How to increase physical activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create safe spaces for play • Play music, learn action songs together • Play/explore indoors and outdoors • Play with other children • Walk or bike instead of driving • Crawl, take a brisk walk, hop, skip, run, dance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play active games (e.g., tag, jump rope) • Visit playground after school • Treasure hunt in a local outdoor space • Walk or sled in the park • “Puddle hop” on a rainy day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After school fitness class/sports (e.g., basketball, hockey, soccer, martial arts, swimming, tennis, skiing) • Pick-up basketball or hockey • Go on a hike, run • Help with yard work • Take the stairs instead of an elevator or escalator
How to reduce sedentary behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit use of playpens and infant seats when baby is awake • Stop for playtime during long car trips • Set rules to limit screen time • Keep TVs and computers out of bedrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set rules to limit after school screen time • Keep TVs and other screens out of bedrooms • Increase active transportation to school • Visit friends instead of texting • Walk family or neighbour’s dog • Stand up and move around after long periods of sitting 	





Provide solutions to barriers

Physicians can help patients break down barriers to healthy active living. Here are a few suggestions to address some of the more challenging roadblocks.

Patient barrier	Suggested responses
<i>"It's impossible to limit screen time for my children"</i>	<p>"Set concrete limits for screen time"</p> <p>"Use a timer"</p> <p>"Remove screens from the bedroom"</p> <p>"Eat meals together — don't eat in front of the TV"</p> <p>"Alternatives to screen time are outdoor play, walking/bike riding, etc."</p>
<i>"We don't have time for physical activity — it's not a priority"</i>	<p>"Build activity into your routine each day — walk or bike to school with your kids instead of driving, take the stairs, get off the bus one stop early"</p> <p>"Encourage your kids to take phys ed in school and participate in after school sports"</p> <p>"Encourage your kids to play active games with friends, like tag"</p>
<i>"My child dislikes sports/ lacks skills to participate"</i>	<p>"Physical activity doesn't have to be an organized sport. It's a simple as ..."</p> <p>"Dance, swim, walk or hike with a friend"</p> <p>"Increase active hobbies/transportation"</p>
<i>"We live in an unsafe neighbourhood"</i>	<p>"Dance to music or do a workout video at home"</p> <p>"Join the community recreation centre"</p> <p>"Encourage your kids to take phys ed in school and participate in after school sports"</p>
<i>"My child is not fit"</i>	<p>"Start slow — 10 minutes a day"</p>
<i>"My teen doesn't want to do activities as a family"</i>	<p>"Ask your teen what she would like to do"</p> <p>"Let her plan a family activity"</p> <p>"Encourage her to do activities with friends"</p>

For more information

The **Canadian Paediatric Society** has developed posters, a prescription pad, videos, and web resources to help health professionals promote healthy active living in practice. Visit www.cps.ca/active-kids or email info@cps.ca

Caring for Kids is the Canadian Paediatric Society's website for parents. It includes a range of resources to help families increase physical activity and reduce sedentary behaviour: www.caringforkids.cps.ca/active-kids

