

FITNESS AND DEVELOPMENT: 24 TO 36 MONTHS

As toddlers transition to preschoolers, motor and cognitive development continues to advance. In a world of fast food and more sedentary lifestyles, obesity has emerged as a significant problem in preschool children. Obesity rates and inactivity of children have risen at epidemic rates worldwide. Furthermore, researchers have found that obesity as a child frequently continues into adulthood and leads to serious health problems, including heart disease, type II diabetes, and mental health issues. The best way to prevent obesity is to educate your child about the need for physical activity and good eating habits. Fortunately, many groups in the United States and worldwide have created guidelines on living healthy for young children.

STAYING ACTIVE

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) have outlined a set of guidelines to encourage physical activity, fitness, and the overall well-being of school-age children. These groups have developed specific recommendations about activity levels, daily physical education class and health education. When selecting a preschool program for your child, ask about time focused on active play. Active play may include a range of activities, ranging from recess on the playground to a simplified game of soccer. While every form of play does not need to be organized, a good preschool should incorporate some type of physical activity into their daily curriculum. For more information on how to improve health in children, visit their websites at <http://www.aap.org> and <http://www.aahperd.org/naspe>.

THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (USDA): MY FOOD PLATE

In the summer of 2011, the USDA reorganized the traditional food pyramid and developed a new model called “MyPlate”. As the food pyramid became too complicated for parents to use, “MyPlate” was introduced as a simpler, more familiar approach for providing general information on nutrition. Using this tool, children are able to understand how specific nutritional recommendations relate to their daily meals. For more information on the USDA “MyPlate”, visit their website at www.choosemyplate.gov.

SCREEN TIME

Although television programs can teach academics, language, and social behavior skills to young children, screen time is strongly linked to obesity. To avoid this risk, the AAP recommends no more than one to two hours of television or video games per day for children over two years of age. In addition, screen time should be balanced with active play. While screen time provides easy entertainment, active play offers the most well rounded approach for your child’s overall development.

SAFETY CONCERNS FOR THE 24-36 MONTH OLD

This age introduces new safety risks. Children as young as three years of age may begin to ride bicycles. This activity requires the use of a helmet that is properly fitted to your child's head. The right helmet must cover your child's forehead as well as the back of his or her skull. Moreover, the chinstrap should fit snugly on their head, so the helmet does not move around when they are riding.

Pools pose another safety risk for your child, as children younger than four years of age do not possess the skills necessary to prevent themselves from drowning. Exposure to water play at an early age will increase your child's comfort level in the pool. However, under no circumstances should a child be left alone in the water without close and constant adult supervision.