

## Physical Fitness In Infants and Toddlers

Dr. Jane Clark, professor and chair of the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Maryland, chaired the NASPE Early Childhood Physical Activity Guidelines Task Force that consisted of motor development experts, movement specialists, exercise physiologists and medical professionals. The purpose of this document is to provide teachers, parents, caregivers and health-care professionals with guidelines that address the kinds of physical activity, the environment and the individuals responsible for facilitating the physical activity.

“Adopting a physically active lifestyle early in life increases the likelihood that infants and young children will learn to move skillfully,” said Dr. Clark. “Promoting and fostering enjoyment of movement and motor skill confidence and competence at an early age will help to ensure healthy development and later participation in physical activity.”

There are five guidelines for each age group, and they are intended to answer questions relative to the kind of physical activity, the environment and the individuals responsible for facilitating the activity. Part of the infant's day should be spent with a caregiver or parent who provides systematic opportunities for planned physical activity. These experiences should incorporate a variety of baby games such as peekaboo and pat-a-cake and sessions in which the child is held, rocked and carried to new environments.

### Five Guidelines For Infants

**Guideline 1.** Infants should interact with parents and caregivers in daily physical activities that are dedicated to promoting the exploration of their environment.

**Guideline 2.** Infants should be placed in safe settings that facilitate physical activity and do not restrict movement for prolonged periods of time.

**Guideline 3.** Infants' physical activity should promote the development of movement skills.

**Guideline 4.** Infants should have an environment that meets or exceeds recommended safety standards for performing large-muscle activities.

**Guideline 5.** Individuals responsible for the well-being of infants should be aware of the importance of physical activity and facilitate the child's movement skills. For toddlers, basic movement skills such as running, jumping, throwing and kicking do not just appear because a child grows older, but emerge from an interaction between hereditary potential and movement experience. These behaviors are also clearly influenced by the environment. For instance, a child who does not have access to stairs may be delayed in stair climbing and a child who is discouraged from bouncing and chasing balls may lag in hand-eye coordination.

## Five Guidelines for Toddlers

**Guideline 1.** Toddlers should accumulate at least 30 minutes daily of structured physical activity; preschoolers at least 60 minutes.

**Guideline 2.** Toddlers and preschoolers should engage in at least 60 minutes and up to several hours per day of daily, unstructured physical activity and should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time except when sleeping.

**Guideline 3.** Toddlers should develop movement skills that are building blocks for more complex movement tasks; preschoolers should develop competence in movement skills that are building blocks for more complex movement tasks.

**Guideline 4.** Toddlers and preschoolers should have indoor and outdoor areas that meet or exceed recommended safety standards for performing large-muscle activities.

**Guideline 5.** Individuals responsible for the well-being of toddlers and preschoolers should be aware of the importance of physical activity and facilitate the child's movement skills.

Adapted From: <http://www.education.com/reference/article/physical-fitness-infants-toddlers/>