



# Physical Activity for Preschoolers



Physical activity and sport are important to your child's growing body and mind, and exposing them to many different kinds of activities at a young age is key.

You can share in your child's learning and growth by getting them involved in physical activities that build upon hand-to-eye coordination. This is a skill that comes with practice. For instance, at meal times, they learn how to use a fork, spoon, or knife to eat. Physical activity is no different!

Now is a good time to get your child using her hands and feet to kick, pick up, and play with toys (stuffed, plastic or wood) in the shape of sports equipment. Learning about balance and height are also important at this time as your child will be trying to climb up, over, under and through everything she thinks is in her way.

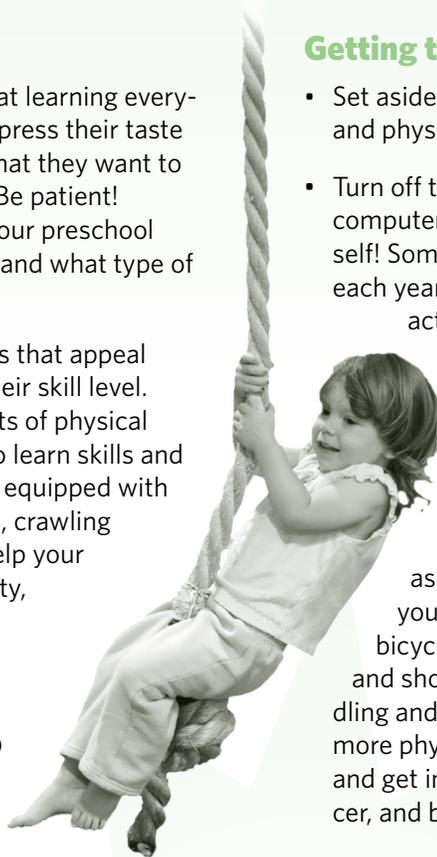
## What activities are best?

Children aged 2 to 5 years are clever at learning everything. This age group will begin to express their taste for different physical activities and what they want to do one day may differ from the next. Be patient! Continue to play and be active with your preschool child, and let them decide how much and what type of physical activity they want to do.

Do your best to find physical activities that appeal to the child and are appropriate for their skill level. Free-play allows children to try out lots of physical skills. Playgrounds are a good place to learn skills and meet other children. They are usually equipped with all sorts of equipment for climbing on, crawling through, and swinging on. This can help your child develop strong muscles, flexibility, balance, and coordination.

## When to start?

Children develop physical (and mental) skills at different ages. The right time to encourage your child to play organized soccer, for example, or ride their bike without training wheels depends on each child. Because skill levels among children in the same age group varies so greatly, most experts agree that physical activities and sport should be based on how mature your child is, the skill level that she can show, and past experiences of the child<sup>1</sup>.



## Getting them interested and involved

- Set aside time to be involved in your child's sport activities and physical games.
- Turn off the television and limit your child's access to computer and video games. Follow the same rules yourself! Some provinces in Canada have 'TV Turnoff' weeks each year as part of a program to promote physical activity. Simply switch off or unplug your TV set for 7 days. The amount of time that is now free means your family will have many chances and ways to be physically active and play together.
  - Be a sport role model. Active parents have active children. Start with physical activities that you and your child can do together, such as playing hide-and-seek or frozen tag. Go with your child when they ride outdoors on a tricycle or bicycle. Play throw and catch with your child. Dribble and shoot a basketball together. Practice some ball handling and kicking with a soccer ball. As your child learns more physical skills, you can swim, skate, or bike together and get involved in sports such as tennis, badminton, soccer, and basketball.

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For more information on CAAWS' *Mothers in Motion* project, please contact [caaws@caaws.ca](mailto:caaws@caaws.ca) or visit the website at [www.caaws.ca/mothersinmotion/e/](http://www.caaws.ca/mothersinmotion/e/).

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<sup>1</sup> P.E. Luebbers. "Youth sports and health - the right time for kids to exercise", American College of Sports Medicine Fit Society Page (printed 2003).