

12 Minutes to a Strong Heart: Making Exercise as Automatic as Wearing a Seat Belt

*By John Burstein creator of
Slim Goodbody Super Hero of Health
And 25 Year Star of PBS Television*



*For more information on children's health, nutrition and fitness
Visit www.slimgoodbody.com*

We spend significant time and energy protecting our children from “Stranger Danger”--and, rightly so. However, the greater real risk lies elsewhere when you look at true Las Vegas-style odds.

The greater risk lies in *not* protecting our children from a sedentary lifestyle. One in five children in the United States are obese—a much larger percentage are overweight. In major studies during the last ten years, children, aged six to seventeen, scored extremely low in areas of strength, flexibility, and cardio respiratory endurance.

Major contributors to both increased weight and decreased physical abilities include the obvious factors of increased TV, video, and video games usage. These factors are just the *symptoms* of underlying social changes leading to decreased physical activities:

- ✓ Our children can no longer play with friends in the park or street unsupervised due to safety concerns. They then come indoors while we do the necessary house work--frequently ending up with some form of TV-based entertainment keeping them quiet.
- ✓ PE in schools is reduced.
- ✓ Correct portion sizes of food have been distorted by “value” menus, television commercial imagery and meal portions served in casual dining and family restaurants.

Despite these social changes and external influences, we *can* teach our kids at a young age to make fitness a part of their daily routine. This article isn’t about getting the best work out possible. It’s not about weight loss,

dieting or “bigger” kids. It’s about making exercise to your child as automatic as putting on a seat belt.

Since we probably all agree there is no better investment in our children’s present and future health than promoting safe, regular exercise, we must turn physical activity into a habit and a “looked forward to” part of their day if only to allow for its benefits:

- Cardiovascular protection through a strong heart muscle
- Lower cholesterol ratings and ratios as adults
- A positive means of weight control
- Greater bone mineral density leading to lower osteoporosis as adults
- Mental health benefits including reduced stress.
- Carry forward benefits—If promoted positively, youthful habits carry into adulthood
- Decreased likelihood of smoking
- Greater flexibility minimizing injury risk
- Lower blood pressure
- Bonding time with your child

Much has been written about children needing a minimum of 30 minutes a week of exercise at least 3 - 4 times a week. Other experts believe that we are applying adult standards to our kids. Let’s face it, kids are not miniature adults. When it comes to physical activity, your child will differ from you in that they typically:

- ✓ Have 20-minute attention spans (except for when in front of the tube).
- ✓ Fatigue in a shorter time
- ✓ Become over-heated quickly, and
- ✓ Become dehydrated in a shorter time

Whatever program you decide is right for you child. I greatly encourage you to dramatically limit television and re-direct them to play.

Don't be afraid to start them young and get your toddler involved in your short daily work out.

Remember exercise isn't just sports.

Creating An Exercise Habit For Life

So how can you make exercise become a daily habit like teeth brushing, helmet wearing and seatbelt-fastening?

Make the time fun and challenging. Provide variety--although a routine is ok too, until the greater challenge is needed.

What exercise is best? Whatever they like to do that can be fit into a regular routine. Set a goal. This could be as simple as getting up and stretching in your pajamas the first thing every morning.

Stick to it. Prepare an exercise log. Provide age appropriate rewards for exercising so many times a week. For our purpose, we want to reward regular, consistent exercise versus the amount of exercise. Feel free to use my simple Star Chart at the end of this article.

- Start with low intensity, short duration activities. Consider starting with a 12 – 15 minute work out every day for the first 8 weeks.
- Set a good example. Exercise with them.
 - Come on, mom and dad, you should be able to rise and shine 12 minutes early to fit this into your morning. It'll have the

added advantage of stimulating your metabolism too.

- Activity must involve large muscle groups to induce the large energy expenditure found in Aerobic exercise (walking, cycling, swimming, dancing, etc). Aerobic is an activity you do over and over to keep bringing fresh oxygen to your muscles and heart to make them strong.
 - Consider 3 minutes of stretching; a set of 10 jumping jacks, followed by 1 minute of running in place, followed by 10 push ups, 1 minute of running in place, 10 sit ups, 1 minute of running in place, repeat this set again and then do three minutes of cool down stretching. Alternatives include:
 - Identifying/measuring a mile run/walk course. Walk for the first three minutes, run for 1 minute (or half a minute), walk for one, run for two, walk for two, run for two, walk for three to cool down. Vary the run/walk times to accommodate your child's fitness level.
 - Jump rope and trampoline bouncing are wonderful exercises that work many parts of your body simultaneously and that your child will enjoy doing with you.
- Your activity should also include resistance training. This tones your muscles and keeps them strong and is just as important as aerobic exercise.
 - It is the total energy expended not the intensity that matters. Walking or running a mile has an

- almost identical effect. However, as endurance improves as you can walk faster, you'll get more calorie burning benefit in a shorter time frame. Remember, right now, we're just trying to create an exercise habit, not win a race or loose weight.
- Have water available during and after even a short work out.
 - Use behavior modification (rewards) to continue the daily exercise habit.
 - Get and keep your child's stomach muscles strong early. They support your back and vice versa. By the time we're adults our stomach muscles are so weak we tend to avoid stomach exercises entirely.

Remember--kids are not always naturally limber and their muscles may be tight and vulnerable to injury during the growth spurts that occur during the elementary years. Be sure to include stretching as a part of your fitness activities.

Encourage your child to take the active option in daily life: walk instead of ride; take the stairs, not the elevator; develop an interest in hands-on activities like building a snowman. Short bursts of activity are cumulative--recess games, vacuuming and an evening walk around the block all add up.

Activating/Re-Activating Your Child

More than half of children are inactive. Physical activity drops sharply during adolescence.

The key to activating kids is to turn off the TV and redirecting their time. Reducing TV from more than 21 hours a week the (the average for an American

Do

- ✓ Check with your doctor before starting
- ✓ Participate with child
- ✓ Make a commitment. Set a schedule. Get back on track if derailed.
- ✓ Define your fitness objectives
- ✓ Notice and verbalize your child's improvements
- ✓ Focus on successes. Praise your child for doing and trying.
- ✓ Avoid competitive
- ✓ Avoid disciplining children over their exercise effort
- ✓ Introduce new activities
- ✓ Ask your child to pick the activity of the day/week/family event
- ✓ Set an example. Take your kids hiking, biking, skating as a family.
- ✓ Attend meets/matches/games
- ✓ Watch for emotional eating. Redirect this behavior to exercise.
- ✓ Wait until they are 7 – 8 for organized sports and 8-12 competitive sports
- ✓ Develop a short exercise plan that includes: warm up, aerobic, resistance and, cool down phases.
- ✓ Practice patience
- ✓ Measure (heart rate, achievements) & reward once a week.

Don't

- ✓ Embarrass your child about his skills verbally or otherwise.
- ✓ Continue if you or your child experiences any pain, dizziness, nausea or severe fatigue
- ✓ Compare your child to a neighbor kid or sibling
- ✓ Force your child into one activity. If a given activity isn't right, find another.
- ✓ Encourage distance running until adolescence (i.e., late elementary school)

kid) to 7 can cut a child's risk of obesity by one third.

Balance TV and computer time with active time. You might want to start by initiating a "No TV T-days" (Tuesday and Thursday). Just as you set a time for homework. Set a time for play/exercise. This should come before TV time. Be a role model by making time for exercise as a family or by yourself.

What about Running?

In general, children should not begin distance running until adolescence (late elementary school). However, if you are a distance runner yourself, and your child is interested in joining you, you can include running as one part of his or her exercise program. Start with short distances—1/4 mile at first, then 1/2 mile, 3/4 mile, one mile.

Run with them at a very easy pace. Make sure you ask your child questions about how he or she is feeling—How are your legs feeling? Are you thirsty? Do you feel dizzy? Am I going too fast? Depending on the answer, take walking or water breaks.

Be sure your child has a regular, almost daily exercise routine if running isn't a daily occurrence. Remember our goal is to make exercise as automatic as putting on a seat belt.

What About Lifting Weights?

Weightlifting can be *one* part of your child's fitness routine. Kids as young as six can participate in a properly supervised weight lifting program.

Since improper weight lifting can result in damaged growth plates or soft tissue injuries, weight training must be

.....Fat Facts--Obesity in America.....

- About 1 in 5 kids 6 – 17 is overweight enough to be considered obese (i.e., 20% or more overweight) according to National Health and Nutrition Surveys, III.
- 1 in 3 adults are considered obese, and a third of them became obese in childhood.
- A child is considered obese if his or her Body Mass Index (BMI. BMIs are ratios based on height and weight. In general, if a body is 20% overweight they are considered obese.
- Obesity is considered a disease because it is associated with so many health problems, including heart disease and diabetes.
- The psychosocial problems due to obesity leading to low self-esteem, psychiatric issues and discrimination by their peers and in the job market, is perhaps a greater danger than the health risks of obesity..
- Extra care must be taken to encourage girls to exercise. Even as early as age 7 – 9, boys are more active than girls. More than 50% of boys exercised at least 20 minutes, three times a week, while only 29% of girls did. And in general, boys expend significantly more energy in their regular activities than girls (playing basketball versus hopscotch).
- Start 'em young. Instilling healthy lifestyle habits while young will likely be more successful than trying to do the same during adult years
- Overweight kids can excel when they pump iron because they are often the strongest kids in class. An inexpensive dumbbell set can provide a good home work out.

properly supervised by an instructor with a C-S-C-S degree.

The best way to prevent injury is to make sure the child isn't lifting too much and that children rest between exercises. You'll know you have too much weight for your child if he or she can't do at least 15 reps easily.

Weight training for kids differs from that for adults. Kids' routines should include a higher amount of repetitions with less heavy weights versus power lifting weights and low reps for adults. Weight training among young kids should not be turned into a competition.

What About Kids With Asthma?

Asmatics kids tend to exercise less as they are afraid of triggering an attack. 85% asmatics have symptoms during or after exercise. While this tends to limit participation, the exact opposite reaction is better as exercise is highly recommended as it opens the airways, allowing more oxygen to flow into the lungs.

The type of exercise chosen is very important. Short burst activities like baseball, golfing, gymnastics, volleyball, are better tolerated than prolonged exercise like running, soccer, basketball or bicycling. With the right control measures, however, your child should be able to participate in any activity.

Always make sure to warm up prior to exercise and to cool down afterward. Take your quick-acting inhaler 15 minutes prior to exercising and stop, rest and relax immediately if you feel you are having difficulty breathing

.....Types Exercises.....

Aerobic

Swimming
Basketball
Hockey
Jogging
Any kind of skating
Soccer
Cross Country Skiing
Dancing
Jumping rope
Stair Steps
Hopscotch
Playing tag
Martial Arts
Trampoline
Hackey Sak
Soccer Knee Bumps

Flexibility

Yoga
Tumbling/Gymnastics
Ballet
Dance
Pilates
Stretches

Resistance

Weight lifting
Push ups
Squats
Punching Bag
Scrubbing Floors
Shoveling Snow
Raking Leaves
Kneading Bread

I hope you found this helpful. Here's to happy children with strong hearts.

Sincerely,

John Burstein

.....
If you found this article helpful, check out our ***Step By Step*** and ***Body Builders*** videos for kids 11 and under at www.slimgoodbody.com/products.html and turn exercise into a habit early.

