

# ACTIVE LIVING FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD



## WHAT'S ALL THE BUZZ ABOUT?



“Physical Activity”

“Active Living”

“Active Lifestyle”

These days, you have likely often heard buzz words like “physical activity,” “active living,” and “active lifestyle.” The buzz is in magazines, on TV talk shows and product advertisements. Closer to home, physical activity is on the priority lists for hospitals, insurance providers, health care providers, workplaces, education institutions, municipalities and government.

These are not new terms so what IS the buzz about? We have long heard about the importance of exercise and fitness. The recent heightened focus is in response to the current and projected health statistics of our population. This collective movement comes from international, national, provincial and regional recognition of the extensive health benefits of movement in our daily lives. The increasing rates of type 2 diabetes and obesity in childhood, and coronary heart disease and cancer in adulthood, indicate the need to improve our lifestyles particularly through regular physical activity and healthy eating. Recreation, fitness and sport are excellent sources for being physically active however “active living,” or having an “active lifestyle,” is an all-inclusive practice. It not only includes recreation, fitness and sport but movement throughout the day in varied settings. Active living is about making movement an integral part of daily life again – like walking to a destination, limiting sitting and idle time, using stairs instead of elevators, yard work, outdoor and indoor play, and less time with a television or computer.

*Active living* and *active lifestyle* is a way of life in which *physical activity* is valued and integrated into daily living.

*Physical activity* includes all body movement resulting in an increase in energy expenditure.

### *And what about PLAY?*

For young children, *play* is often synonymous with what we call *physical activity* for older children and adults. Physical play is integral to healthy early childhood development.

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN CHILD CARE CENTRES

Nova Scotia Health Promotion developed this resource for child care operators and staff, in cooperation with the Early Childhood Development Services’ section of the Department of Community Services. Its purpose is to encourage child care staff to help young children of Nova Scotia lead an active lifestyle to enhance health. The resource provides suggestions and recommendations that may assist you in developing programs and methods to encourage children to increase their physical activity at child care centres.

## BENEFITS, BENEFITS AND MORE BENEFITS

Countless studies link recreation, including physical activity, to improving quality of life for all ages; for young children such benefits are motor and cognitive development. Some experts believe it also improves math and reading comprehension. Most children love vigorous play but research is showing even those as young as two years old are not physically active enough for ideal development.

### Personal Benefits of Regular Physical Activity

- ✓ Enhances healthy growth and development
- ✓ Builds strong bones
- ✓ Strengthens muscles and heart
- ✓ Maintains flexibility
- ✓ Achieves a healthy weight
- ✓ Promotes good posture, coordination and balance
- ✓ Improves fitness
- ✓ Be with and meet friends
- ✓ Improves physical self-esteem
- ✓ Increases relaxation

*From Health Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living*

Even under-active three and four year old children tend to have underdeveloped essential skills in their later years, like body and spatial awareness, and reaction time. These children can become uncomfortable or awkward playing with others, and eventually may avoid activity and grow up to believe they are incapable. Learning basic skills such as running, throwing, catching, kicking, balance, and coordination helps shape a positive attitude towards physical activity.

## WHY IT'S EVERYONE'S CONCERN



Today children expend four times less energy than 40 years past and exercise 75 % less than in 1980. Even four-year-old girls are physically active four hours a week less than boys. Over 40 % of Canadian children aged 2 to 5 were overweight in 1998/99; about half of these could be considered obese. Researchers in Nova Scotia found only 1 in 10 students in grade 11 is getting the activity they need to achieve health benefits. What this means is health complications and diseases like diabetes, obesity, heart disease, cancer and depression are rapidly on the rise.

Although most knowledge about physical activity and its benefits concerns people over six years old, experts agree the earlier a child is active, the better. Early childhood years are critical because an active child is more likely to lead a healthier lifestyle as an adult. Healthier adults can lead to valuable social and economic benefits for the province.

American researchers studied the sedentary patterns of babies kept in strollers, play pens and infant seats for hours at a time and found that this may delay development of rolling, crawling, walking and learning skills. They developed "Guidelines for Infants" and "Guidelines for Toddlers and Preschoolers." The infant guidelines say parents and caregivers need to assist limb movement with activities like peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake. Toddlers and preschoolers should not be still for more than 60 minutes at a time (other than sleeping) and should play actively for 60 minutes to several hours per day. Additionally, child care staff should include a physical activity session for a minimum total of 30 minutes each day for toddlers and at least 60 minutes each day for preschoolers. Activity can be done in intervals (ideally 10 minutes at a time) throughout the day. For example: 10 minutes three times per day equals 30 minutes.

Child care providers and early childhood educators can help children learn the movement skills necessary to maintain an active lifestyle, and participate in dance, sport and recreation.

## WHAT ARE WE DOING ABOUT IT IN NOVA SCOTIA ?



Everyone is getting involved – professionals and volunteers - from health, education, transportation, business, natural resources, communities, justice, sport and recreation. Many organizations are doing their part to promote healthier practices like active living. Nova Scotia Health Promotion is implementing a strategy called *Active Kids Healthy Kids*. Working with many varied partners, the strategy aims to increase the number of children who are regularly active. One objective is to encourage an increase in physical activity in child care settings.

[www.gov.ns.ca/ohp/srd](http://www.gov.ns.ca/ohp/srd)

## 12 WAYS TO ENCOURAGE YOUNG CHILDREN TO BE ACTIVE IN CHILD CARE CENTRES

1. Create an environment for recreation at the child care centre: access to outdoor space, indoor space for movement, danceable music, indoor and outdoor toys and equipment, a playground. Be attentive to safety; children will gain more confidence about their physical abilities in a comfortable setting that reduces harmful experiences.
2. Be an active role model; participate in games, dancing, action songs and outdoor play. Adult participation in physical activity increases participation rates of the children.
3. Encourage parents to dress their children appropriately; clothing that allows free mobility, appropriate seasonal outdoor clothing and informal clothing rather than outfits to be kept "neat and clean."
4. Offer opportunities for physical activity everyday, not just on "special days." Active play that is as regular as lunch and nap-time will help make physical activity a natural part of their daily life.
5. Plan activities within the children's abilities so they can achieve success. Experiencing achievement will encourage them to further explore their physical skills. Reward and recognize improvement.
6. Display photos of the children being active. Post posters and images of children moving and playing actively.
7. Walk to points of interests rather than go by vehicle. Demonstrate to children the fun of walking to places! Walk to a park or playground - ultimate destinations for fun and vigorous play.
8. Emphasize fun rather than competition and teach fundamental skills like running, throwing, catching and kicking a ball with varied activities. Praise and encouragement will build the children's confidence.
9. Practice fairness. Avoid comparisons of children's abilities. Encourage females to be as active as the boys and try the same activities. Make observations without making reference to gender (ex: what boys and girls should/not do).
10. Offer a wide choice of activities (ex: catching, dancing, walking, planting garden, playing tag, building a snow person, tobogganing, tidying up the toys, etc). Offer both structured (to teach basic skills) and free-play activities (for fun, to enhance discovery and creativity). Encourage the children to offer their ideas or suggestions for activities.
11. Include children with special needs. Recreation Nova Scotia represents the provincial interests of the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with Disabilities who have resources and a "Moving To Inclusion" bag full of adaptive equipment. The bag is available on loan – free - for a period of two weeks (child care centres regularly borrow it).
12. Schedule 30 to 60 minutes total each day for physical activity including instructed and unstructured activities.

*Partially based on a resource developed by the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sport and Physical Activity.*

## PLAYSPACES AND PLAYGROUND SYSTEMS

Child care providers play an important role in encouraging young children to run, jump, climb, skip, lift, hop, pull, push and swing. Playground equipment such as slides, bars, stairs, climbing apparatus and swings allow children to have fun, socialize and be creative while being highly physically active.

While children should be challenged and allowed to try their limitations, safety is important. There are ways to prevent or reduce injuries without letting go of the importance of play. The Canadian Standards Association sells "*A Guideline on Children's Playspaces and Equipment*" which provides design and maintenance standards for play structures and play areas.

The Recreation Facility Association of Nova Scotia (RFANS) offers seminars on playground safety, maintenance and inspection, and risk management. The Playground Maintenance Seminar is taught by an expert and offered - to anyone interested - annually or every two years. A seminar may be specially arranged given there is a commitment from a group. RFANS can give contact information for an advisor on playgrounds and playground suppliers. Additionally, the Facility Development Coordinator at Nova Scotia Health Promotion can help answer questions about playgrounds.

### Just a few of the playground safety measures:

- ✓ Read about safety of play spaces and equipment
- ✓ Attend the Playground Maintenance Seminar at RFANS
- ✓ Establish a procedure for regular playground checks
- ✓ Stay close and watch children closely. Teach them how to play safely.

*These type of measures and more are available from the Canadian Child Care Federation: Resource Sheet #32 titled "Playground Safety" prepared in 1995 by Lynda Homer, Early Childhood Consultant, Office of Childhood Services, New Brunswick.*

## TOYS, EQUIPMENT AND PLAY "STUFF"

Children need a regular mix of indoor and outdoor physical activities. It is important to have available a variety of quality equipment and toys that encourage rapid movement, balance, coordination, reaction response, muscular strengthening, basic movement skills and fun. Check local sport stores and toy departments for quality items. Suppliers that specialize in physical educational products offer a broader range of items more suitable for young children in a learning environment. There are many new products that are excellent for young children such as modified sports balls and recreational balls for all skills – varied sizes, weight and speed. Here is a sample of some items to have in child care centre.

Outdoors	Indoors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open Space</li> <li>• Playground system</li> <li>• Sand Box</li> <li>• Shovels and buckets</li> <li>• Wheeled Toys and Trikes</li> <li>• Variety of Balls</li> <li>• Skipping Ropes</li> <li>• Tunnels (fabric)</li> <li>• Bouncing apparatus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Music</li> <li>• Dance/Movement Videos</li> <li>• Rhythmic flags or ribbons</li> <li>• Bowling Kits</li> <li>• Beanbags</li> <li>• Floor Cushioned Mats</li> <li>• Balance systems</li> <li>• Wheeled Toys</li> <li>• Large Building Blocks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soft Foam Saucers (Frisbees)</li> <li>• Balls: Sponge, Kicking Balls, Beach Balls, Body Balls, Easy Grip Bumpy</li> <li>• Scooter Boards</li> <li>• Lightweight Soft Paddles, Bats and Ball</li> <li>• Parachute</li> <li>• Streamer Ribbons for Rhythmic Movement</li> <li>• Velcro Catch Mitts and Ball</li> <li>• Hop-Scotch Carpet (or draw it with chalk)</li> </ul>

### A Few Reminders About Children's Toys and Equipment:

- ✓ Use the recommended age labelling as a guide for toys suitable for the children's ages.
- ✓ Avoid toys with sharp points or edges and rigid parts
- ✓ Check for quality (example: loose parts)
- ✓ Follow safety messages and general instructions
- ✓ Teach the children to use the equipment properly
- ✓ Inspect toys regularly
- ✓ Avoid toys with sharp points or edges and rigid parts

*Adapted from KidsCare materials produced by Heath Canada*

### Outdoors – Nature's Play Space

Because of the time children spend indoors, where there tends to be less activity, it is important to be aware of their opportunities to be physically active. Schedule a designated time for movement each day – indoors and outdoors. Try to allow for frequent movement outdoors and have back-up options available for indoors on a rainy day. This avoids skipping the physical activity schedule, which demonstrates to the children that being active is important and can be part of a daily lifestyle.

When the snow and ice covers the play space, what next? Get outside! Winter in Nova Scotia offers excellent opportunities to be physically active: walking and climbing snow mounds. A little snow goes a long way – making snow angels, snow castles and snow people. *Visit [www.taketheroofoffwinter.com](http://www.taketheroofoffwinter.com)*



### WHO CAN HELP?

When you need advice about fitness, physical activity, recreation, sport and early childhood physical activity there are organizations that can help. You may want to learn where to purchase equipment and resources? Want to learn more about physical activity? You may need help understanding something about an activity. There are people who can help.

- Your municipal Recreation Department
- Recreation Nova Scotia
- Your Regional Representative from Nova Scotia Health Promotion (Physical Activity, Sport and Recreation area)

## RESOURCES | BOOKS | VIDEOS

*Health Canada and Nova Scotia Health Promotion (Physical Activity, Sport and Recreation area) distribute:*

### *Health Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living*

Health Canada | 2002 | Series of guides | Free



Health Canada has a series of guides to help children and youth, adults, and older adults make wise choices about physical activity – choices that will improve health, help prevent disease and get the most out of life. Although the guides are targeted to ages 6 to 9 and ages 10 to 14, they provide information and advice relevant to all ages. For child care settings, the interactive magazine can be used with the help of an adult. The chart (poster) with the stickers is excellent for young children. All of these materials are colourful, youthful and have wonderful fun cartoon images of children.

#### Guides

Family Guide to Physical Activity for Children

Teachers Guide to Physical Activity for Children (ages 6 – 9)

#### Interactive pieces for the children

Gotta Move! Interactive Magazine for Children (6 – 9)

Physical Activity Chart and Activity Stickers for Children

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*The Canadian Paediatric Society* endorses and sells two health guides specifically for child care settings:

#### *Well Beings:*

1999 | 1012 pages | ISBN 0-9695630-8-6 | \$\$69.95 ( Member \$59.50)

*A Guide to Promote the Physical Health, Safety and Emotional Well Being of Children in Child Care Centres and Family Day Care Homes, 2nd edition*

The definitive guide to child care in Canada, *Well Beings* is a comprehensive reference manual for child care centre directors, parents, caregivers, early childhood instructors and others. *Well Beings* contains information on nutrition, preventing and managing illness, emergencies, injury prevention, children with special needs, as well as administrative information for caregivers. The book includes fact sheets, medical forms and other materials that can be photocopied.

*Little Well Beings: A Handbook on Health in Family Day Care* 1994, 140 pp | ISBN 0-9695630-6-X | \$12.95 ( Member \$10.95)

Designed for people who care for children in their homes, *Little Well Beings* is a practical reference guide for professional caregivers and parents alike. Spiral-bound and indexed, the book has sections on children's health, safety, guidance, nutrition, and well-being. It also addresses concerns about the stress of child care and the health of caregivers.

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*Canadian Institute of Child Health* developed and sells:

#### *Moving and Growing: Exercises and Activities for Children from Birth to Six Years of Age*

*Moving and Growing I: Exercises and Activities for the First Two Years*

2004 | 103 pp | \$5.00

*Moving and Growing II: Exercises and Activities for Twos, Threes and Fours*

2004 | 91 pp | \$5.00

*Moving and Growing III: Exercises and Activities for Fives and Sixes*

2004 | 92 pp | \$5.00

This series of three booklets outlines exercise, activities and games for children from birth to six years of age. Written for childcare providers and parents, each has suggestions for safe, age-specific play and exercises to enhance motor development and physical fitness.

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*Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance* suggests and sells resources for early childhood physical education:

***500 Five-Minute Games***

Silberg | 1995 | 272 pp | \$ 33.95 (Member \$30.55)

Includes games, songs and easy learning ideas designed to capture the energy and enthusiasm of children aged three to six. Games focus on balance, body awareness, cooperation and coordination. Additionally there are games for drama, language and numbers.

***Active for Life***

Sanders | 2002 | 128 pp | \$ 32.95 (Member \$29.65)

***Developmentally Appropriate Movement Programs For Young Children***

This book provides guidance on what high-quality movement programs should include: effective movement environments, components of physical activity and more.

***Wiggle, Giggle & Shake***

Pica | 2001 | 216 pp | \$ 33.95 (Member \$30.55)

200 movement-inspired activities for children aged four to eight to encourage children to participate physically in their learning. There are 38 themes including transportation, seasons, animals and holidays.

***Snow Fun! Favourite Canadian Winter Activities***

CIRA | 2000 | 80 pp | \$20 (Member \$18)

This collection of fun winter physical activities includes scavengers, relays, tags and more. Each activity outlines the description, objective, skills, age, space, equipment and variations with. Games appropriate for indoors are indicated.

***Growing Up Through Games and Play***

Lehnert & Lachmann | 240 pp | \$26.95 (Members \$ 24.25)

CAHPERD endorses this as an excellent resource for child care staff caring for three to six year olds. More than 600 exercises and activities help develop children's basic movement skills such as skipping, throwing, catching and climbing.

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Purchase or order from a *bookstore, specialty bookstore* or *multi-media store*.

***Sesame Street's: SS Elmoize and Get Up and Dance***

SS Elmoize: Elmo's exercise camp features children and Muppets bending, stretching and getting fit.

Get Up and Dance: Big Bird throws a dance party and shows children his favourite dances

***The Wiggles: Wiggle Time***

Lyrick Entertainment | 1999 | 40 mins | Approx \$14.95

This 40-minute video features 16 fun songs to dance, wiggle and teach song-specific movements and lyrics. The costumed characters Dorothy the Dinosaur, Captain Feathersword, Henry the Octopus and Wags the Dog are phenomenally popular in Australia. The Wiggles encourage children very well to be active. Toddlers and children up to age five enjoy chances to participate in songs with actions and body movements.

***Moving With A Purpose: Developing Programs for Preschoolers of All Ages***

McCall, Craft | 2000 | 248 pp | \$ 25 US

This easy-to-use guide to building movement programs claims it is presented in such way that even those with no experience teaching movement can practice it immediately. It explains the fundamentals of movement and motor development, features 54 proven activities, how to teach and assess movements, and addresses special needs.

***SportFun: Developmentally Appropriate Movement Skill Activities for 3-5 year olds***

2001 | 94 pp | \$29 US

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (in USA) has an easy-to-use packet that teaches ways to help preschool aged children practice and improve basic movement skills like running, jumping and playing skills. It includes 40 full-colour illustrated activity cards, instructions for correctly teaching enjoyable activities and guide for equipment. More like play rather than tedious exercise, the activities can be set up easily and safely according to the appropriate pace. Examples: Hot Potato, Spacewalk, Band Aid Tag, Rabbit Trails.

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*Recreation Nova Scotia* sells:

***Moving to Inclusion***

Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability | 163 pp

***Active Living Through Physical Education: Maximizing Opportunities For Students With Multiple a Disability***

The practical guide assists with the inclusion of children with disabilities by providing modifications to physical education activities in such areas as assessment, equipment and rules, instructional strategies and learning objectives. Additionally there are nine comprehensive versions specific to a disability.

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**American Alliance for Health Physical Education Recreation and Dance** sells:

**Active Start:**

National Association for Sport and Physical Education | \$13.00

**A Statement of Physical Activity Guidelines for Children Birth to Five Years**

National experts provide guidance about the physical activity capabilities and needs of infants, toddlers and preschoolers. Order at 1.800.321.0789.



References:

- Statistics Canada, National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth: Childhood Obesity*
- Child and Family Canada, Resource Sheet #52, Supporting Your Child's Physical Activity*
- Nova Scotia Health Promotion, Physical Activity Levels of Children in Nova Scotia*
- Early Childhood Development: Part of Our Future, Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance*
- Rae Pica, Your Active Child: How to boost Physical, Emotional and Cognitive Development Through Age Appropriate Activity*
- National Association for Sport and Physical Education, Early Childhood Physical Activity Guidelines Task Force report*
- Canadian Institute of Child Health, Survey of Physical Activity Among Preschool Children in Licensed Day-Care Centres*

Active Living for Early Childhood is from:

Nova Scotia Health Promotion  
Physical Activity, Sport and Recreation Program Area  
5516 Spring Garden Road, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3J 1G6  
Toll-Free: 1.866.231.3882 • Phone: 902.424.7512 • [www.gov.ns.ca/ohp/srd](http://www.gov.ns.ca/ohp/srd)





## USEFUL ORGANIZATIONS

Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance	<a href="http://www.cahperd.ca">www.cahperd.ca</a>	800.663.8708	A charitable, voluntary-sector organization whose primary concern is to influence the healthy development of children and youth by advocating for quality school-based physical and health education
Canadian Child Care Federation	<a href="http://www.cccf.ca">www.cccf.ca</a>	800.858.1412	Resources: • One page sheets on playground and toy safety, fitness, outdoor play and physical activity. (\$1.50) • Tools for Practitioners in Child Care Settings (\$8)
Canadian Institute of Child Health	<a href="http://www.cich.ca">www.cich.ca</a>	613.230.6654	The only national charitable organization dedicated solely to improving the health of children in Canada. It has had a profound impact on the policies and practices of caring for our children including
Canadian Paediatric Society	<a href="http://www.cps.ca">www.cps.ca</a> <a href="http://www.caringforkids.ca">www.caringforkids.ca</a>	613.526.9397	Advocacy and education about the health needs of children, by pediatric experts.
Canadian Playground Safety Institute c/o Canadian Parks and Recreation Assoc.	<a href="http://www.cpra.ca">www.cpra.ca</a>	613.523.5315 Ext: 301	Sells video: "Inspecting Playgrounds for Hazards" (CPRA is national voice for parks and recreation to build communities and enhance quality of life.)
Public Health Agency of Health Canada	<a href="http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/paguide/">www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/paguide/</a>	888.334.9769	Call for free physical activity guides or physical activity chart posters and stickers.
Heart and Stroke Foundation of Nova Scotia	<a href="http://www.heartandstroke.ca">www.heartandstroke.ca</a>	800.423.4432 902.423.7530	Has the "Family Fun Pak" and skip ropes for the Jump Rope For Heart program. Educates parents and staff at family resource centers about physical activity.
Invest in Kids	<a href="http://www.investinkids.ca">www.investinkids.ca</a>	877.583.KIDS	Focus is on healthy development of newborns to five year olds by campaigns, education and research. Website has a useful section for caregivers called "we recommend" that identifies preferred organizations, websites, books and video.
Physical Activity Resource Centre	<a href="http://www.ophea.net/parc">www.ophea.net/parc</a>	1.888.446.7432	PARC provides training and consultation, networking, referrals, and resource and information dissemination services. Although this is in Ontario, it can be a valuable resource to Nova Scotia.
Recreation Facility Association of NS	<a href="http://ww.rfans.com">ww.rfans.com</a>	902.425.5450 Ext: 330	Advice on playground systems Offers workshops: • Playground safety, maintenance and inspection • Risk Management
Recreation Nova Scotia	<a href="http://www.recreationns.ns.ca">www.recreationns.ns.ca</a>	902.425.1128	Works to ensure all residents have the right to enjoy accessible, high quality recreational activities. The Physical Activity Coordinator and other staff are well connected to various networks and can help you with some inquiries about insurance, physical activity, equipment, resources, etc.
Safe Kids Canada	<a href="http://www.SafeKidsCanada.ca">www.SafeKidsCanada.ca</a>	888.723.3847	Has guidelines for using home standard playground equipment and spaces with some supply/product information.
Nova Scotia Health Promotion – Physical Activity, Sport and Recreation program area	<a href="http://www.gov.ns.ca">www.gov.ns.ca</a>	902.424.7512	The government office manages the <i>Active Kids Healthy Kids Strategy</i> for increasing kids' physical activity as a means to disease prevention and improved children's development. There are six regional representatives who can connect you with the right people in other organizations and address inquiries about physical activity. Also distributes Health Canada's free physical activity guides.
Jumpstart Program (Coresport) c/o Gymnastics Nova Scotia	<a href="http://www.gymns.ca">www.gymns.ca</a>	902.453.2582	A workshop teaches how to use 20-week lesson plan and a tote of simple toys to introduce basic movement skills for children 3 to 6 years old.