



Becoming Your Physical Best

Aerobic Fitness

Aerobic means “with oxygen.” The heart and lungs of an aerobically fit person do a good job of sending oxygen to the muscles so that the person can exercise for longer periods of time. To a child, this simply means “the ability to play longer without becoming tired.”

No matter your age, improving or maintaining aerobic fitness improves your health in many ways. Aerobic fitness:

- **Strengthens the heart.** This leads to a lower heart rate while you’re at rest and a lower heart rate while you’re working. You will also recover faster from exercise as your heart gets stronger.
- **Decreases blood pressure.**
- **Strengthens muscles and bones**—to grow (or age) stronger.
- **Increases energy**—to play longer.
- **Allows you to perform more work with less effort.** For example a child may notice, “I can carry my toys without becoming tired or needing help.”
- **Reduces stress and tension.** For example a child may get along better with others. An adult may enjoy reduced blood pressure.
- **Helps you look and feel better**, bolstering self-esteem.
- **Improves ability to learn.**
- **Promotes healthy body composition** (ratio of fat to lean mass).



Becoming Your Physical Best: Aerobic Fitness

From *Physical Best activity guide: Elementary level*, 2nd edition, by NASPE, 2005, Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

- **Increases self-confidence and self-esteem**, leading to greater social opportunities.
- **Enhances sleep**—need we say more?
- **Improves lipid profile** (increases HDL [good cholesterol], decreases triglycerides [bad cholesterol]). Believe it or not, in today’s fast-food culture, *even children may develop cholesterol problems.*
- **Weight control.**

Parents’ Corner

How Much Is Enough?

Children naturally play in short bursts, such as 5 to 10 minutes at a time. They should accumulate about 60 minutes or more, per day total, nearly every day, to achieve or maintain aerobic fitness. Keep in mind that neither you nor they need to participate in highly intense physical activity all the time. There are many benefits to be had through moderate intensity exercise as well. Here is an easy scale to keep in mind:

Low intensity: You can still talk and sing while moving.

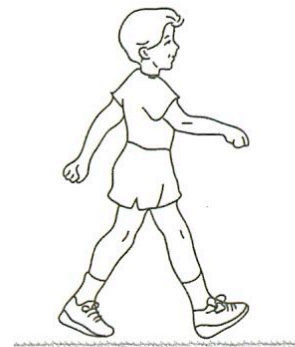
Moderate intensity: You can still talk but you don’t feel you would be able to sing.

High intensity: You don’t feel as if you can talk or sing.

A long moderately paced walk, for example, will give you a chance to catch up on the day’s events—and burn fat. At the same time, the risk of injury is low.

Aerobic Fitness Safety

Keep activities fun and never use them for negative purposes. Gradually build up aerobic fitness as a team with your child. You’ll both benefit physically—and emotionally.



Physical activity on very hot and humid days or very cold days can be risky. Children do not tolerate exercising under these conditions very well. In hot and humid weather, be sure to provide plenty of cool water, shade, and rest periods. Have your child slow down if he or she becomes winded, flushed, or complains of discomfort. In cold conditions, have your child wear layered clothing and limit his or her exposure to cold.

Other safety tips include wearing

- proper shoes for the activity,
- helmets for cycling and other sports, and
- light-weight clothing when the weather is hot.

Family Fun

There are many fun physical activities you can do with your child to promote aerobic fitness while enjoying being together. Planning for variety and focusing on fun will help keep your child's interest high. Resist the urge to stress

achievement. Instead, enjoy the time being active as the "home team."

Suggested aerobic fitness family activities:

- Bike riding
- Swimming
- Shooting hoops, playing one-on-one or two-on-two basketball
- Playing one-on-one or two-on-two soccer
- Silly races, e.g., adults must hop and kids can run; you may also have older kids move differently to make the race more even for younger kids: older kids, e.g., skip, hop, while younger kids run
- In-line, roller, and ice skating
- Nature walks and hiking
- Walking the dog
- Playing tag
- Playing hide-and-go-seek, in a large, safe outdoor area with a home base to run to, to be "safe"
- Turn on music and dance!

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