

Physical activity, Technology and Children (& some alternatives!)



Recently, the World Health Organisation (WHO) released their research with recommendations about how much time children should be spending being active, as well as how much time they should be sitting still and using technology.

How active should my child be?

It depends on their age and physical abilities; however, these are the recommendations:

- 12 months and under: Babies should be encouraged to be active (rather than being strapped in strollers and carriers) as much as possible. 30 minutes of tummy time, spread throughout the day, is recommended.
- 1-2 years: 2-3 hours of different physical activities
- 3-4 years: 3 hours of physical activities, ranging from mild to high intensity activities. In addition to this, encouraging your child to walk rather than being in a stroller, is great for their healthy development.
- These might seem like a lot! So don't expect to reach them every day. But when it comes to physical activity, more is better, so squeeze it in whenever you can.

How much time should my child be sitting still?

- 12 months and under: Babies should be given freedom to move around as much as possible. It is recommended not to restrain them in strollers or carriers for more than 1 hour.
- 1-2 years: It is recommended for children of this age to also not be restrained for more than an hour or to sit still for long periods of time.
- 3-4 years: It is best if preschoolers don't sit still for any more than an hour (without actively engaging in an activity such as craft or reading).

How much technology should my child be engaging with?

Technology is becoming more common and easier to access. This comes with both positives and negatives for our children. Technology can provide a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the world however it can also be used simply to keep a child "busy" for a few hours of the day. So according to the World Health Organisation, how much time should children actually be using technology (e.g. iPads, watching television etc.)?

- 12 months and under: it is recommended that babies don't have any screen time at all.
- 1-2 years: 1-year-olds should have no screen time at all, and 2-year-olds should have no more than an hour of screen time. Less is better!
- 3-4 years: Preschoolers should have no more than an hour of screen time a day.

Why is this so important?

By children spending more time being active outside or actively engaging in activities, rather than sitting with technology, there can be a positive impact on their:

- Fine motor skills
- Gross motor skills
- Cognitive development (including their ability to concentrate)

So, what should I do?

- Encourage your child to play outside as much as possible. If you have free time in the day, go to your local park or go for a bike ride. Let them dig in the garden or build a cubby.
- Use a timer when allowing your child time on a screen. When the timer goes off, the screen goes away / is turned off and your child can choose a different activity. It may help to give your child a warning when the time comes close to finishing.
- When sitting with your child for long periods of time, try to engage with them as much as possible. You could read a book or sing songs together, talk about some favourite memories or make a list of things you would like to do.

What activities can I offer my child if I am busy?

- **Dancing:** Turn your child's favourite music on and encourage them to dance. For some extra fun, you could provide them with scarves to use. This encourages movement and develops their confidence in their gross motor skills, along with a different way to express their creativity.
- **Cutting skills:** Fine motor skills are extremely important for your child, particularly in the lead up to school. You can give them a pair of child safe scissors and a catalogue. Ask them to eg. cut out all the red coloured items. This will develop their colour recognition skills, as well as continuing to develop their fine motor skills. They could also make their own "shopping list" of things from the catalogue.
- **Drawing:** Encouraging your child to draw a picture helps to develop their ability to transfer ideas, as well as expressing creativity and continuing to build on fine motor skills.
- For an audio, non-visual story telling option, try the 'ABC Kids Listen' App. You can even turn this on as your child is drawing, building or enjoying another favourite activity. As they are doing this activity, they can listen to the story and this builds on their literacy, as well as their listening skills.
- **Sensory bottles** are a fabulous option for children who are looking for something different to do. By simply filling up a bottle with water and adding different items such as feathers, beads, pom poms, glitter etc. your child can have a great time making the bottle and then spend time watching the objects float up and down in the water. (We suggest putting sticky tape around the top of the bottle to discourage it being opened during use). Sensory bottles can be visually stimulating, as well as teaching scientific ideas such as lighter objects that float and heavier objects that sink.

For more information and/or to read the whole report, the pdf is available here:

<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/311664>

For some more tips, see here:

<https://www.common sense media.org/blog/5-strategies-for-getting-kids-off-devices>

And some more ideas!

<https://www.mother.ly/parenting/22-ways-to-keep-a-preschooler-busy-other-than-watching-tv>