

Promoting Physical Activity in Children: A Pediatrician's Role During National Physical Fitness & Sports Month

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May is recognized as **National Physical Fitness & Sports Month**, providing an important opportunity for pediatricians to reinforce the role of physical activity in preventing and managing childhood obesity. According to recent guidance from the **American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)**, pediatricians should take a proactive role in counseling families about healthy lifestyle habits, with physical activity being a cornerstone of obesity prevention and treatment.

Childhood obesity remains a significant public health concern in the United States, affecting nearly one in five children. Sedentary behaviors, increased screen time, and decreased participation in outdoor play and organized sports have contributed to this growing epidemic. The updated AAP clinical practice guideline emphasizes early identification, family-centered counseling, and lifestyle interventions as the first-line approach in managing pediatric obesity.



Importance of Physical Activity

Regular physical activity provides numerous health benefits for children beyond weight management. It supports cardiovascular health, improves bone density, enhances mental well-being, and promotes better sleep and academic performance. Physical activity also plays an important role in reducing the risk of chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and dyslipidemia.

The AAP recommends that children and adolescents aged 6-17 years engage in **at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily**. This should include:

- **Aerobic activity:** Activities such as running, biking, swimming, or playing sports most days of the week
- **Muscle-strengthening activities:** Examples include climbing, push-ups, or gymnastics at least 3 days per week
- **Bone-strengthening activities:** Such as jumping rope, running, or basketball

For younger children aged 3-5 years, the recommendation is to encourage **active play throughout the day**.

Role of Pediatricians in Counseling Families

Pediatricians play a critical role in promoting physical activity during routine health visits. Simple counseling strategies can make a meaningful impact. Providers should assess daily activity levels, screen time, and participation in sports or active play. Counseling should be practical, family-centered, and culturally appropriate.

Key counseling points may include:

- Encouraging families to schedule **daily active play** as part of their routine
- Limiting recreational screen time and promoting outdoor activities
- Encouraging participation in school sports, community programs, or family-based physical activities
- Modeling healthy behaviors within the family

Even small changes, such as walking after dinner, biking to school, or choosing active recreation over screen time, can significantly improve overall activity levels.

Conclusion

National Physical Fitness & Sports Month serves as a reminder that promoting physical activity is an essential part of pediatric preventive care. By integrating routine counseling, encouraging family engagement, and advocating for active communities, pediatricians can help children build lifelong habits that support healthy growth and development.

References

1. American Academy of Pediatrics. Clinical practice guidelines for the evaluation and treatment of children and adolescents with obesity. *Pediatrics*. 2023
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Physical activity guidelines for children and adolescents.



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