

American Academy of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

Developmental Milestones by the End of 3 Years

Movement

- Climbs well
- Walks up and down stairs, alternating feet
- Kicks ball
- Runs easily
- Pedals tricycle
- Bends over easily without falling

Hand and Finger Skills

- Makes vertical, horizontal and circular strokes with pencil or crayon
- Turns book pages one at a time
- Builds a tower of more than six blocks
- Holds a pencil in writing position
- Screws and unscrews jar lids, nuts and bolts
- Turns rotating handles

Language

- Follows a two- or three -component command
- Recognizes and identifies almost all common objects and pictures
- Understands most sentences
- Understands physical relationships ("on," "in," "under")
- Uses four- and five -word sentences
- Can say name, age and sex
- Uses pronouns (I, you, me, we, they) and some plurals (cars, dogs, cats)
- Strangers can understand most of her words

Cognitive

- Makes mechanical toys work
- Matches an object in her hand or room to a picture in a book
- Plays make-believe with dolls, animals and people
- Sorts objects by shape and color
- Completes puzzles with three or four pieces
- Understands concept of "two"

Social

- Imitates adults and playmates
- Spontaneously shows affection for familiar playmates
- Can take turns in games

- Understands concept of "mine" and "his/hers"

Emotional

- Expresses affection openly
- Expresses a wide range of emotions
- By 3, separates easily from parents
- Objects to major changes in routine

Developmental Health Watch

The developmental milestones give you a general idea of the changes you can expect as your child gets older, but don't be alarmed if her development takes a slightly different course. Each child develops at her own pace. Do consult your pediatrician, however, if your child displays any of the following signs of possible developmental delay for this age range.

- Frequent falling and difficulty with stairs
- Persistent drooling or very unclear speech
- Inability to build a tower of more than four blocks
- Difficulty manipulating small objects
- Inability to copy a circle by age 3
- Inability to communicate in short phrases
- No involvement in "pretend" play
- Failure to understand simple instructions
- Little interest in other children
- Extreme difficulty separating from mother

Excerpted from [*Caring for Baby and Young Child: Birth to Age 5*](#), Bantam 1999

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Fitness and Your 2 to 3 Year Old

Fitness that starts in childhood is a lifelong investment. Studies have shown that children who participate in fitness activities continue to stay active throughout their lives. Developing the habit of fitness promotes healthful behaviors, improves self-esteem, and decreases the risk of serious illnesses such as heart disease and stroke later in life. In addition, regular physical activity at any age helps your child to play and meet challenges. Part of committing your child to fitness may include limiting your own excessive computer or television time, as well as becoming a role model by getting regular exercise on your own or with your children. Remember that you are your child's best role model, so always pay attention to safety in sports and recreation.

Physical Fitness and Chronic Health Conditions

Children with chronic health conditions and disabilities should not be excluded from fitness activities; they receive the same positive benefits from exercise. Some activities may need to be modified or adapted to your child's disability. Certain activities are dangerous for some health conditions. Consult your child's doctor about the safety of fitness activities for your child with a disability.

What Exercises Can Kids in This Age Group Do to Stay Fit?

Toddlers use play to explore and learn about the world. By encouraging even the youngest child to engage in active play, parents prompt a child's exploration and natural curiosity about how his body works.

Two- and 3 -year-olds thrive on unstructured play. To help toddlers develop skills, running, swinging, climbing, playing in a sandbox, and carefully supervised waterplay are all fun and healthy. By age 2, active, fit children should be able to jump with two feet, skip and run. By age 3, they should be able to change directions (from left to right, from forward to backward) comfortably.

Although there are a number of programs to teach toddlers how to swim, do gymnastics, or even begin to learn baseball basics in peewee leagues, parents should carefully investigate these programs, with an eye toward safety, philosophy, and age-appropriateness. Most children this age are not developmentally ready to play in organized sports or to be involved in competitive activities. If your child doesn't want to participate in an activity for any reason, don't force your child. Try to find out if there are any fears or reasons why your child is reluctant to join in the play. If necessary, postpone the activity, and introduce it later. Waiting a few years and then suggesting the activity again is probably the wisest course.

What Should Parents Do if They're Concerned About Their Child's Fitness?

If your toddler refuses to play or interact with peers, it can be an indication of a physical or psychological problem. Children who complain of pain when they play or consistently refuse to join other children in outdoor play may need to be seen by a health care professional. Even a shy child needs to play with other kids. Socialization skills are important to future functioning. You may want to seek out child play groups to give your child more opportunities for peer interaction.

Family Fitness Tips

Any number of activities can be incorporated into family fitness. Walking, playing and running in the backyard or using playground equipment at a local park can be fun for the entire family.

Always keep safety in mind. Small fingers can get easily caught in playground equipment, and wheeled objects such as tricycles or bicycles can promote sudden twists or falls. One common activity that is not recommended is the use of trampolines. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all trampolines, including home trampolines, be avoided due to the high number of injuries at all ages.

When engaging in family fitness outings, remember these tips:

- All children and adults should always wear helmets when on tricycles, bicycles and big wheels; wearing a helmet will become a lifelong habit if started early.
- Monitor children when they cross streets; even if your child has been instructed to "look both ways," kids engrossed in a neighborhood game can easily dash after a ball without thinking.
- Safety is a particular concern when it comes to water sports. Never let your toddler around a pool without your constant supervision. It takes very little time for a toddler to slip beneath the water. Swimming programs for young children have an eye on safety and teach valuable skills.
- Use sunscreen whenever your child is playing outdoors, even on overcast days, to prevent sunburn and decrease the risk of developing skin cancer at a later age.

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Choosing Healthy Snacks

Many children arrive home from school and head straight to the refrigerator for a snack. There is nothing wrong with moderate snacking, since youngsters have high levels of activity and may need more calories than three meals a day provide to meet their energy needs. For many children - particularly those who are quite physically active - snacks can help round out their nutritional requirements and provide as much as one fourth of their calories. In general, occasional snacks will not ruin their appetites for regular meals, as long as the snack is not eaten shortly before they sit down to lunch or dinner. Snacks are another opportunity for parents to provide healthy food choices to their children while reinforcing good eating habits - learning to get hungry, rather than eating to feel full all the time.

When snacking, children often reach for the closest food at hand. If your cupboard has cookies in it, that is probably what your child will eat. However, if there are healthier items in the refrigerator or on the kitchen table, your youngster will become accustomed to snacking on these foods. The healthiest and simplest choices are fruits and raw vegetables, which require little if any preparation. Encourage your child to make healthy snacks a habit by keeping fruit and cut vegetables (carrots, cucumbers, celery, peppers, broccoli) handy.

Children in the older range of the middle years also can learn some simple cooking techniques. As they prepare snacks for themselves, you can teach them to differentiate between healthy and less healthy choices. However, be sure they learn appropriate safety precautions for the use of a stove, oven, microwave or other cooking appliance.

Healthy Snacks for Any Mood

Your child's snacking moods may vary, but he can still consistently maintain healthy snacking habits. For instance, if his snacking mood is:

Thirsty! Cold skim or low-fat milk, mineral water with lime, chilled vegetable juice, fruit juice (apple, grape, grapefruit, orange, pineapple, raspberry).

Smooth! Yogurt, banana, papaya, mango, custard, cottage cheese, "fruit smoothie." ("Fruit smoothie" recipe: Blend one cup of skim milk, three ice cubes, your favorite fresh fruit, and a dash of vanilla, cinnamon, and nutmeg in a blender.)

Crunchy! Raw vegetables (asparagus, bell pepper, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, zucchini), apples, corn on the cob, unbuttered popcorn, puffed-rice cakes, wheat crackers.

Juicy! Fresh fruit (berries, cantaloupe, grapes, grapefruit, kiwi, nectarine, orange, peach, plum, watermelon, frozen juice pops, tomato, pear).

Fun! Fruit, frozen grapes, frozen bananas.

Really hungry! Hard-boiled eggs, granola, sandwich, cereal with milk, bran muffin, peanut butter (on crackers or bread), nuts, cheese.

How to Reduce Dietary Fat and Cholesterol

Family eating habits determine what your child will learn to eat and enjoy. Here are some ways you and your family can limit fat and cholesterol in your diets:

- Keep fresh fruits and vegetables available.
- Serve whole-grain bread and cereals.
- Rely on low-fat milk and low-fat yogurt. Select cheeses that are lower in fat.
- Include starchy foods (potatoes, pasta, rice) in your meals.
- Avoid high-fat and high-calorie toppings, including butter, margarine, sour cream, and gravy. Instead, use herbed cottage cheese, grated parmesan cheese, or low-fat yogurt as toppings.
- Serve lean meats, such as chicken, turkey, fish, lean beef cuts (lean hamburger, top loin, top round, eye of round) and lean pork cuts (tenderloin, loin, chops, ham). Cut away visible fat and remove the skin from poultry.
- Select margarine and vegetable oils (canola, corn, olive, sunflower and soybean oils).
- Choose frozen fruit bars, angel food cake, or low-fat frozen yogurt instead of rich, creamy desserts.
- When cooking, use nonstick vegetable sprays to cut down on added fat.
- Choose fat-free cooking techniques, such as baking, broiling, poaching, grilling, or steaming when preparing meat, fish and poultry. Do not use butter or margarine when preparing or serving vegetables.
- Serve vegetable-based and broth-based soups. Choose low-fat milk when making cream soups.

Excerpted from "[Caring for Your School-Age Child: Ages 5-12](#)" Bantam 1999

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