

# Move On:

## Reversing Children's Sedentary Lifestyles Part 2

Simple changes can help children move past sedentary lifestyles. This does not mean implementing a strict physical education program, but rather gathering knowledge and planning for physical activity that supports optimal health, enjoyment, and builds life-long practices.

### Move on: Plan for movement

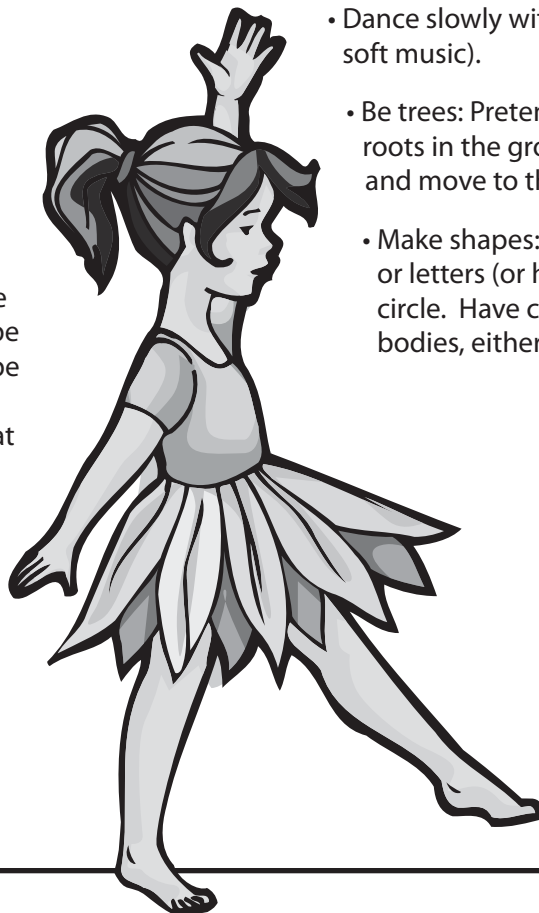
It is recommended that children participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity most days of the week, preferably daily. This 60-minute time period does not need to be acquired at one time, but can be accomplished by using smaller chunks of time. Remember that the most beneficial physical development for young children is through free play in environments (both indoors and outdoors) that are encouraging, fun, and promote movement.

### Slow movement

Physical activity doesn't always mean movement that is fast, loud, or chaotic. Physical movement can be slow, calm, and quiet. In fact, allowing time for "slower movement" helps children develop self-control and gain the benefits of physical activity without over-stimulation. The trick is to balance physical activity with active and controlled times, structured and unstructured times, and indoor and outdoor times.

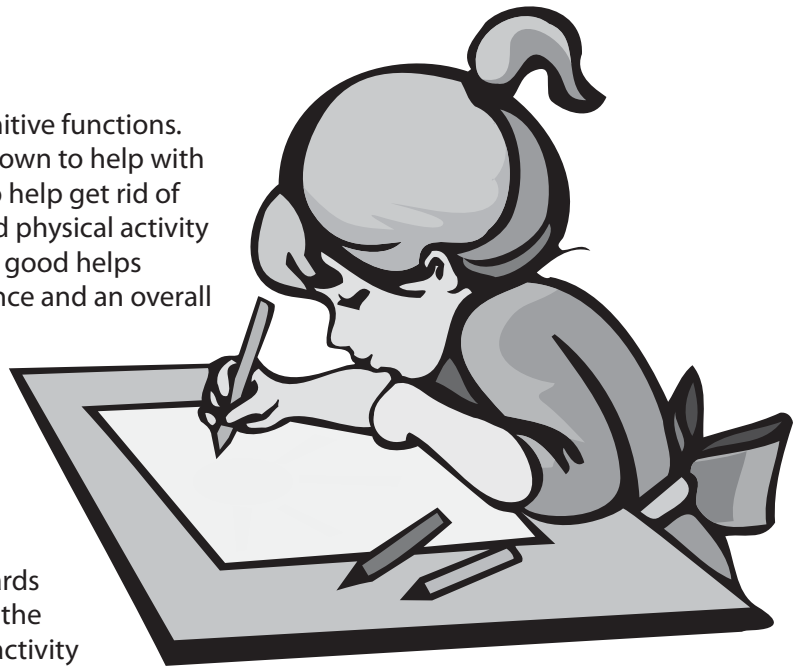
### Try the following for "slow movement" activities:

- Provide a small throw rug for each child to help define their space. While listening to soft, slow music, guide simple stretching and movement. This can be done inside or outside. For a challenge, add a ball or simple prop to stretch with.
- Dance slowly with long, flowing scarves (in silence or with soft music).
- Be trees: Pretend to grow from a seed and develop strong roots in the ground as you grow taller and taller. Listen and move to the wind rustling through your branches.
- Make shapes: Present pictures or photographs of shapes or letters (or have children draw examples), such as a circle. Have children try to make that shape with their bodies, either in a small group or alone.



## Brain benefits?

There is growing evidence that exercise benefits cognitive functions. Exercise increases blood flow to the brain, which is shown to help with memory and concentration. Physical activity is said to help get rid of pent-up energy, allowing children to focus better. And physical activity simply makes children feel good (adults too!). Feeling good helps children not only with learning, but with self-confidence and an overall positive outlook.



## Move on to active lifestyles

With clear intentions, good information, and simple actions, early educators can help the movement towards active lifestyles for children. Maybe sooner than later, the words associated with children's health and physical activity will not be *obese* and *sedentary*, but rather *strong*, *healthy*, *fit*, and *happy*.

**“The brain benefits from improved blood flow and oxygen; the spirit benefits as well.”**

~Ann MacDonald

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