

Children's Need for Physical Activity

- Children in the United States today are less fit than they were a generation ago. Many are showing early signs of cardiovascular risk factors such as physical inactivity, excess weight, higher blood cholesterol and cigarette smoking.
- Inactive children, when compared with active children, weigh more, have higher blood pressure and lower levels of heart-protective high-density lipoproteins (HDL cholesterol).
- Even though heart attack and stroke are rare in children, evidence shows that the process leading to those conditions begins in childhood.
- The 2003 Youth Risk Factor Surveillance Study indicates that 33.4 percent of youth don't engage in physical activity that promotes long-term health.
- A fitness testing program sponsored by the Chrysler Fund Amateur Athletic Union, which tracks fitness among 9.7 million people between ages 6–17, shows that children are getting slower in endurance running and weaker.
- The National Health and Nutrition Examination Study (NHANES, 1999-2002) found that the prevalence of overweight American adolescents ages 12–19 was 16.7 percent for males and 15.4 percent for females. There was an increase of 250 percent from 1970 to 2002.
- About 16 percent of adolescents ages 12–19 have total cholesterol levels exceeding 200 mg/dL.
- An estimated 22 percent of American children under age 18 are exposed to secondhand smoke in the home. An estimated 2,000 American young people become smokers every day.
- Children spend an average of three to four hours a day watching TV.
- Inactive children are more likely to become inactive adults.
- Healthy lifestyle training should start in childhood to promote improved cardiovascular health in adult life.
- ***The following good health practices should be promoted among children:***
 - regular physical activity
 - a low-saturated-fat, low-cholesterol diet after age 2
 - smoking prevention
 - appropriate weight for height
 - regular pediatric medical checkups

HOW DO YOUR CHILDREN RATE ON THIS CHART?

Physical Activity Pyramid

