

Ready to play

Outdoor play items can be simple, cheap everyday items – such as soft balls, pom poms, balloons, stockings filled with socks (to hit with a bat or the hand), pots and pans, boxes, wooden blocks, hoops and streamers. Collecting and making play items for your child to keep in a ‘treasure box’ can increase their willingness to play outdoors more often.

With encouragement and supervision, your child can experience the endless adventures and excitement of outdoor play.

Dress your child in clothing and footwear that allows for large muscle movements, and that is appropriate for the weather. Always remember to include a hat. Ask early childhood staff and carers about the types of outdoor activities your child enjoys and the skills you can help your child to improve.

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GET UP & GROW

HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD



Getting out and about Outdoor active play



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing



Children who spend a lot of time outside tend to be more active than children who spend most of their time indoors. Use outdoor areas – such as backyards, parks, playgrounds, footpaths, beaches, bush trails, lakes and rivers – in your family’s activity plans. Being outdoors also offers a chance to learn about and experience a different environment.

Making use of daylight hours to go outdoors can be a fun and active alternative to spending long periods of time watching television or being inactive indoors.

Outdoor play for all ages

Even before your baby can walk or talk, being outdoors helps with learning about different surroundings and feeling comfortable with the outside world. Not only is playing outside free, it is also an easy way to help your baby develop sensory, physical, mental and social skills.

Some examples of learning through outdoor play include feeling grass and leaves, hearing cars and birds, and looking at the sky or swaying trees. If you do not have a backyard, it is even more important to take your baby to local outdoor areas as often as possible.

Outdoor areas for preschoolers and toddlers usually provide children with more space and a variety of equipment, so they can use all of their muscles and learn about how their body can move. Outdoor play also gives children plenty of chances to try new and favourite movements; engage in ‘rough and tumble’ play; seek adventure; improve balance, strength and coordination; and manage their fears.

‘Risky’ play

Although outdoor play may appear risky, children need opportunities to play freely and explore outdoor play spaces. What some adults may see as consequences of ‘risky’ play could actually be side effects of fun play experiences – for example, being messy and loud, getting grubby, small grazes, and dealing with heights and new play areas.

The benefits of outdoor play far outweigh the risks when it comes to children’s development.

Types of outdoor movements

Children need to be encouraged to use many different parts of their body, particularly when they are still learning new skills. Movements to try outdoors include:

- upper body movements: digging, pushing, pulling, building and throwing
- lower body movements: marching, jumping, pedalling and kicking
- full body movements: climbing, rolling, crawling and twisting.

As your child begins to improve at doing particular movements, provide some challenges that allow them to move their body in a range of different patterns, shapes, speeds and directions – such as jumping over a log from a raised platform; running backwards, sideways or forwards around an obstacle course; and climbing higher on a ladder.

