



FIREMAN DRILL

Firefighters need to get into their gear quickly. This activity may even help speed your morning routine along.

what you'll need: your child's clothes for the day

who's playing: preschoolers, grade-schoolers

how many: 1 or more

prime time: any day

Challenge your child to beat the clock as she gets dressed, just like firemen do. (It may help younger kids if you lay out the clothes for them.)

fitness factor: cardio, flexibility, balance, coordination

covert calories: He'll burn about a calorie a minute.

sneaky supercharge: Place a list of clothing items on the wall and have your child run to check off the item that he's put on after each addition.

HOW MANY?

This game not only keeps kids moving, but helps them count.

Does your child know how to count in a foreign language? Challenge her to count in Spanish, too!

what you'll need: your imagination

who's playing: preschoolers, grade-schoolers

how many: 1 or more

prime time: any day

Ask your child to find out how many skips, jumps, and hops it would take to get from one place to another. For example, how many skips would it take to get from the car to the house?

fitness factor: cardio, balance, coordination

covert calories: She'll burn 73 calories in 20 minutes.

sneaky supercharge: Time her to see how many seconds it would take her to sprint from one place to another.

ICE, ICE BABY

Forget the etiquette school lesson of balancing a book on your head—this version is way "cooler," while still teaching grace and balance. The giggles are worth the effort!

what you'll need: one ice cube per child

who's playing: preschoolers, grade-schoolers, tweens

how many: 1 or more

prime time: any day, rainy days, playdates

Challenge your child to balance an ice cube on his head. See how far he can walk without it falling.

fitness factor: balance, strength

covert calories: He'll burn 9 calories in 10 minutes' time.

sneaky supercharge: See if he can squat without the ice cube sliding off.

MEMORY MOVES

This activity was inspired by the heroine of Akeelah and the Bee, as well as by research that shows that moving rhythmically and putting words and facts to music helps you remember things. Plus: Exercise boosts blood flow to a brain area involved in memory—all of which will come in handy during homework time!

what you'll need: a homework assignment

who's playing: grade-schoolers, tweens

how many: 1

prime time: any day

Help your child memorize her multiplication tables, spelling words, or any other homework assignment by encouraging her to walk around the house as she repeats the words.

fitness factor: cardio

covert calories: She'll burn 18 calories in 20 minutes.

sneaky supercharge: Have her jump rope or do lateral jumps over a tile in your kitchen or floorboards, which will burn another 73 calories.

HALFTIME SHOW ▶

Say the words "Hannah Montana" and you won't have to do much prodding to get kids to start singing and dancing.

Who—or what—else will your child get a kick out of imitating?

what you'll need: a remote with a mute button

who's playing: grade-schoolers, tweens

how many: 1 or more

prime time: any day

Every time a commercial comes on, press the mute button and ask your kids to give you a floor show—sing, dance, or act out what just happened in the show they're watching.

fitness factor: cardio, coordination

covert calories: She'll burn 41 calories in 20 minutes.

sneaky supercharge: When the show's over, request a full recap—have them act out all the parts and give you a coming attraction of what they think will happen in the next episode.

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fitness

made

An active kid is a heart-healthy kid, so here's how to get yours up and moving at every age.

BY MISSY CHASE LAPINE AND LARYSA D'IDIO

Here is the great mystery of modern family life: Your kids' calendars are packed and your family never seems to rest, and yet your children don't actually physically move all that much. There's an awful lot of sitting going on in families across America—in front of video games, computer monitors, televisions, and tiny cell phone screens. For kids of all ages, “play” happens in the den and not in the backyard. Exercise is becoming as antiquated as a VHS player.

The result is that our kids aren't learning these crucial lessons: that exercise can give them more energy, improve their brain power, boost their self-esteem, make them stronger, and ward off health issues like obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. Oh, and did we mention that exercise can actually be *fun*?

Kids' personalities, interests, and capabilities change as they grow, so knowing what makes your



fun

kid tick will help you figure out how to motivate him. By incorporating age-specific exercise into your children's lives—without them even realizing what's going on—you'll be helping them see that moving their bodies makes them feel good. And that's the most natural way to set them up for lifelong good health.

preschoolers

Parents of preschoolers rejoice—your little ones are at the perfect age for building healthy fitness habits. They're just about bursting with natural energy, which makes it easier to persuade them to join you in activities. They are, for the most part, blank slates when it comes to moving their little bodies, since they haven't yet formed any negative associations with exercise. Nor have they had time to develop much affinity for sitting on the couch. In short, they're perfectly primed for making fitness not only a part of their day, but a part of their future.

That said, preschoolers are often intense about their play, so you may have difficulty tearing them away from, say, building blocks and knocking them down. But they're also easily distracted, so as soon as you present another fun option (like catching fireflies), they'll get on board.

Physically, a preschooler's large muscle control is more developed than his small muscle control. Preschoolers run, jump, and balance with confidence, but activities involving fine detail—or ones that take longer than a few minutes—will frustrate them. Because preschoolers have a short attention span, it's best to go from activity to activity as many times as your children are willing—and for as long as you can keep up with them!

grade-schoolers

If there's ever an age where kids like to plot and plan, it's from 5 to 8 years. Grade-school schemers are interested in real-life tasks and activities—and have the attention span to see most of them through. They're also becoming more competitive and are eager to test their strength and skill against you, siblings, and classmates. ►

Now that your children are out in the wider world—the classroom, friends' houses, the playground—you have less and less control over their activities, and less-than-desirable preferences begin to creep up (“But Mom, Jimmy has a TV in his room”). Kids this age start to become computer-centric and, if left to their own devices, will spend hours in front of a screen playing games. And once homework starts up for real, kids spend even more time sitting still.

Physically, school-age kids are adept at both gross and fine motor skills, and their strength and muscular coordination improve rapidly—so don't be surprised if you suddenly find yourself having to keep up with them.

tweens

It seems as if it happens overnight—your adorable grade-schooler comes home with a new language, a new attitude, and a new opinion on everything. It's harder to motivate your tweens to get moving. Technology has entered their world in an almost omnipresent way. Their social lives become less about “play” and more about “hanging out.”

Unfortunately, it's a vicious cycle. The more your child is sedentary, the more he'll want to be sedentary and resist when you try to push him. The secret is to tap into the activities your kid loves. Once you get tweens interested in something, they'll focus all their attention on it. (Ever seen a tween talk about *High School Musical* or *The X-Men*?)

Another trick: Make your middle-schooler think that it's not about him, it's about you. Tell him you want to get back into shape or eat right or learn to dance or take up yoga, and ask him for help by going for a walk with you, helping you make healthy dinners, or going to a class with you.

No matter how old your kids are, the bottom line is this: Know your child. Find out what brings a smile to his face (spending time with Mom, helping out Grandma, finding the latest tunes for his iPod), and adapt your exercise ideas to these things he already loves. Remember: A happy kid is usually a healthy kid.



BIG FOOT ▶

You've always wanted your kids to follow in your footsteps! Here's a way to do just that while helping keep their hearts healthy and muscles strong. (P.S. This activity also works on the beach—without the boots, of course!)

what you'll need: a pair of snow boots

who's playing: preschoolers, grade-schoolers

how many: 1 or more

prime time: snowy days, weekends

Make footprints in the snow and challenge your child to step from footprint to footprint.

fitness factor: cardio, balance, strength, coordination, mood booster

covert calories: She'll burn 109 calories in 30 minutes.

sneaky supercharge: Lengthen your stride so she has to jump from print to print. Or, lead her up a hill or two, which doubles the amount of calories she'll expend.

▽ MARCHING BAND

You don't need 76 trombones to lead a big parade. All you need are some willing band members and some imagination. The music you make may not hit the top of the charts, but the exercise you're sneaking in is solid gold.

what you'll need: musical instruments, or make your own with pots and pans, beans in a coffee can, a plastic container filled with water, or upside-down buckets

who's playing: preschoolers

how many: 2 or more

prime time: any day, weekends, playdates, parties

Lead your “band” around the house and/or outside, and up and down stairs, reminding them to march by bringing their knees up high as they go.

fitness factor: cardiovascular endurance, coordination, mood booster

covert calories: Marching will burn 53 calories in 20 minutes.

sneaky supercharge: Have them step side-to-side for one minute, skip for one minute, walk backward for one minute, and jump for one minute as you make your way through the parade route. You'll shave off an extra 72 calories.

FUN FACT! The instrument that burns the most calories is the drum—twice as many as wind and brass instruments.