

# Lifestyle Tips



Issue 03-03/11

## Reducing Kids' Sedentary Time for Health Benefits



We can all agree that physical activity is good for us, but did you know that too much sedentary behaviour can be harmful to your health? Research studies

show that when young people spend too much time engaged in sedentary behaviour such as watching television, spending time on the computer, playing video games, or using motorized transportation, it can lead to poor fitness later in life, impact weight and obesity, and is associated with

increased risks of chronic diseases. Parents need to not only be concerned about their kids' physical activity levels but also take a closer look at how much of their time is spent not moving.

Feeling a bit bewildered by it all? To help counsel parents, the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology has recently released the first ever Guidelines for Sedentary Behaviors for Canadian children and youth. These guidelines urge Canadian parents to limit their kids' screen time to less than 2 hours per day. The Guidelines also recommend limiting sedentary transport, extended sitting, and endorse reducing time spent indoors throughout the day.

Our kids' leisure-time habits can be especially hard to change, but try gradually replacing one or two sedentary activities each week with physically active alternatives. Here are some easy ideas to turn stationary kids into kids-in-motion:

**Put limits on screen time.** Parents should limit their children's recreational screen time (television, computer, and video games) to 2 hours or less per day. To make it even easier to reduce screen time, don't put a television in



your child's bedroom, don't watch television during dinner, and restrict computers and other electronic gadgets to a supervised family area.

**Put down the remote and pick up a ball.** Turning off the television and trying out a new sport with your child is a great way to cut down on sedentary time for the entire family. If organized sports teams are not for you, don't worry. Even casual activities like walking the dog, playing freeze tag, or monkeying around on the playground can get your family outside. And don't forget that by asking your kids to help you out with household chores such as washing the car or mowing the lawn, you are also helping them get off the couch and moving.

**Change the way you play.** Kids will still want to play video games—they are kids, after all. So if you can't beat it, at least you can move it. A new concept in video games, called

exergaming is gaining popularity among parents and kids alike. Activity-based video games, like the popular dance routine games, use a player's physical movements to control what happens on the screen and can boost energy expenditure and calorie-burning power. An added boon for weather-challenged Canadians—exergaming can also get sluggish kids active when the thermometer dips low and the snow is piled high.

**Decrease motorized transportation.** Many of us spend far too much time sitting in our cars during the daily commutes to school and work. One of the best ways to decrease sitting time for kids is to encourage and support them to actively commute to school. Children and teens can walk, ride their bike, or rollerblade to and from class. This can be a very fun and social activity when biking or walking with parents or friends—a great way to start the day and talk to each other.

**Be a good role model.** Kids look up to their parents as role models from a very young age, so be prepared to walk the walk. By being a positive "active" role model you will help reinforce your children's physical activity behaviour throughout their entire life. So make being active a priority for yourself as well as for your kids. Take the lead on decreasing daily sedentary time by rounding up everyone for walks with the dog after dinner, bike rides on the weekend, or organizing a family ski day.

When you talk to your children about the importance of being more active and spending less time sitting, they will be more likely to embrace the changes you are suggesting. Engaging kids in the planning process, and allowing them to choose activities they like, will empower kids with the skills they will need to maintain a healthy lifestyle as they grow older, and that's one of the best gifts a parent can give.

Check out the ParticipACTION website to get tips on how to get more active. <http://www.participaction.com/en-us/GetMoving/AParentsGuidetoActivity.aspx>

Check out the new CSEP Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for children and youth. [www.csep.ca/guidelines](http://www.csep.ca/guidelines)

