

Importance of Physical Activity

Exercise has many benefits. The most obvious are those related to maintaining a healthy weight and preventing diseases that result from being overweight and/or inactive (ie. Heart disease, stroke, diabetes, etc).¹ These benefits are just as relevant to children as they are to adults. In fact, children with disabilities are at a higher risk of becoming overweight/obese,² and therefore, developing related diseases.



- ❖ Risk factors for becoming overweight seen in children with disabilities:
 - Reduced level of physical activity compared to other children²
 - Decreased motivation²
 - Motor skill deficiencies and/or physical disabilities (such as with cerebral palsy, spina bifida, etc)²
 - Additional medical issues that restrict level of activity (such as heart issues seen with Down syndrome)²
 - Require medications that lead to weight gain²

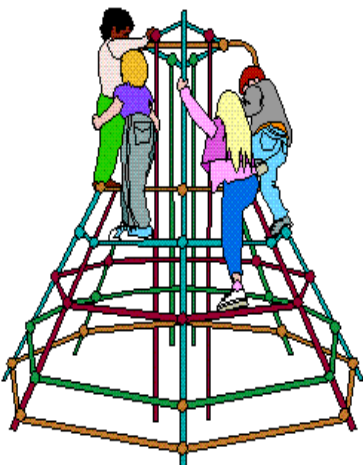
- ❖ Physical activity can help to improve your child's:

- Cardiovascular endurance
- Muscular endurance
- Strength
- Coordination
- Emotional regulation (just as it may help to improve your mood when you are stressed)
- Sleep patterns.



- ❖ You can help your child become more physically active by:

- Playing at the park (encourage your child to climb on the various structures)
- Riding bikes
- Swimming
- Going for family walks
- Attending community gross motor programs
- Dancing to music, videos, or using dance or "Wii" type games
- Doing yoga
- Providing activity options within the home/yard. For example:
 - Obstacle courses (crawling under/over, climbing stairs, animal walks, jumping, etc)
 - Races with siblings (using animal walks, wheelbarrow walks or other forms of movement)
 - Simon Says or Follow-the-Leader (incorporate various movements)



¹World Health Organization, *Obesity and Overweight*, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs311/en/index.html> (March 2011).

²World Health Organization, *Population-Based Prevention Strategies for Childhood Obesity*; (World Health Organization, 2010), 12.