

Exercise has Extra Benefits for Children with Autism



Being active is beneficial for the health and fitness of any child. For children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), exercising may also provide the sensory stimulation they crave to help ease some repetitive behaviors, like hand-flapping, rocking side to side, repeating phrases, or spinning in circles, that can get in the way of learning and connecting with others. According to one study, tapping a ball reduced hand-flapping and jogging reduced body-rocking, suggesting that exercises similar to a child's repetitive behavior were beneficial.

Exercising may also help children with ASD to:

- ✓ Improve motor skills
- ✓ Enhance social skills
- ✓ Improve focus and academic performance
- ✓ Build confidence

Encourage children with ASD to get the physical activity they need by:

- ✓ Setting aside specific times for exercise so it's a predictable part of the weekly routine
- ✓ Keeping each session short and sweet, especially at first—even just five to 10 minutes can have a positive impact
- ✓ Asking a healthcare provider or health educator for exercise suggestions and printing pictures of the activities to use as visual aids

Sources include: American College of Sports Medicine, the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, and the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders

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