

# The Real Reason Kids Need To Exercise

By Nicole Thomson Pride

We often hear that exercise has tremendous benefits for children, but has anyone ever explained to you the reasons why?

There are a few known facts about parenting. You'll experience love like you never thought possible. Sleep will become a thing of the past. You'll master the art of negotiation (and most probably bribery, too). And your family and friends will know the solutions to all your parenting problems. But despite their best intentions, the problem with your family and friends giving expert advice is they rarely elaborate on the benefits of what they're actually saying.

A good example of this is exercise. Whether your child's not sleeping well, misbehaving at school or lacks a little self-esteem, no doubt a friend or family member has said your child would benefit from exercising more. And chances are, they're probably right, but perhaps without knowing why.

So in case you've ever been offered this advice, here are some of the benefits of children exercising, which you might not know:

## **Exercise can help with children's brain development**

Sariah Scott, a psychologist at The Children's Psychology Clinic, explains how exercise leads to increased blood flow to the cortex of the brain, which can actually cause the neurons in the area to grow and form more synapses and connections.

"The cortex of the brain is what's developing during early childhood [and] is responsible for your higher functions, like planning, decision-making and impulse control," Sariah says. "It is a really important area to develop."

## **Exercise can help children perform better academically**

Sariah explains how numerous studies have proven exercise improves academic performance.

"Vigorous physical activity has been shown to be associated with better grades [and] higher academic achievements," Sariah says.

She also explains how sometimes parents have the misconception that if their child exercises during a time when they could be studying or reading their grades will slip, but that isn't the case. "Research has shown that including physical activity doesn't have any negative affects on their academic performance," Sariah says.

## **Exercise is extremely powerful for mental health**

While most children are not affected by anxiety or depression, it is important to know exercise can help protect against these mental health illnesses developing. "Exercise has been shown to be a protective factor," Sariah explains. "It is linked to decreased prevalence and incidence of depression and anxiety."

It can also have therapeutic benefits for people who are affected by these mental health illnesses, which can benefit teenagers as they begin to feel the pressure and stress to perform well academically and fit in socially.

### **Exercise can help improve children's behaviour**

Nathalie Brown, child behaviour consultant and founder of Easy Peasy Kids, explains how as long as a child is enjoying exercise and does not have too many other commitments, exercise can have great benefits on a child's behaviour.

Nathalie says the main benefits are learning to work as part of a team, developing resilience in trying, and improvement in behaviour, such as having more self-control and being less impulsive.

"Children keep it very much together at school," Nathalie says. "Exercise is a great release for them."

### **Exercise can increase a child's confidence**

"I think the number one benefit [of children exercising] is it increases their self-esteem," Maree Prestwidge, personal trainer and founder of HealthMe, says. A few years ago she started running bootcamps for children and quickly noticed how much their confidence grew once they started getting into the sessions.

She also explains how children can gain great pride from exercise by setting a big goal, like running around the whole oval without stopping, and then working towards achieving it. Plus, through sport, you have the chance to teach your children the valuable life lesson that they don't always have to be the best.

But given how busy life is these days, how much exercise do children need to do? The short answer is at least some form of exercise every day. Maree says toddlers should be running around for at least 30 minutes a day, while school aged children should be aiming for 45 to 60 minutes of semi-formal exercise every day.

"It doesn't have to be formal exercise," Maree says. "You just need to find something that your child loves to do."

Maree gives the example of walking the dog. "If your child is happy to walk the dog with you for 30 minutes every day, [that's fine, as] they are still moving."

And given the many benefits of exercising throughout all stages of life, Maree thinks it is important to encourage children to get into the habit of regular exercise from a young age. "I think it is really important that children learn it is a lifestyle thing and they learn that exercise is something you do every day," Maree says. "Just like how when you get up, you brush your teeth."

So next time you're having a parenting dilemma and your self-proclaimed expert family and friends tell you that exercise is the answer, at least now you'll know the reasons why.

Source: [http://www.essentialkids.com.au/older-kids/nutrition-and-fitness-for-older-kids/the-real-reason-kids-need-to-exercise-20131108-2x6bx.html#utm\\_source=FD&utm\\_medium=lifeandstylepuff&utm\\_campaign=exercise](http://www.essentialkids.com.au/older-kids/nutrition-and-fitness-for-older-kids/the-real-reason-kids-need-to-exercise-20131108-2x6bx.html#utm_source=FD&utm_medium=lifeandstylepuff&utm_campaign=exercise)