

# 3 Steps for a healthy you

## Be More Physically Active



## Sedentary Time-Screen Time

Children and youths should not be sedentary for long periods, whilst sedentary screen time should be discouraged as much as possible, as this can lead to unhealthy behaviours later on in life. Sedentary screen time should be as limited as possible.



## Sleep Time

Children and youths should get enough good quality sleep, depending on their age, as this influences behaviour, learning patterns, mental health and risk of obesity.

Age	5-13 years	13-17 years
Sleep Time	9-11 hours	8-11 hours

Sleep time based on recommendations from the NHS Foundation



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GOVERNMENT OF MALTA  
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER  
MINISTRY FOR HEALTH

# Be Active Guidelines for CHILDREN AND YOUTHS 5-17



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## What is physical activity?

Physical activity is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as 'any type of body movement produced by skeletal muscles which results in energy expenditure'. This means that any type of activity which requires the child and youth to move around and not be sitting or restrained can be classified as physical activity; however, different types of activities vary in intensity.

## What does intensity mean?

The intensity of physical activity or any form of exercise refers to how much energy is used during an activity. It is important to perform physical activity and exercise at the correct intensity to reap the benefits. Intensity can be easily monitored with a sing-talk test. If the child or youth is able to sing whilst moving, this indicates that the activity is of **light intensity**; if they are able to talk but not sing (for example whilst riding a bicycle), this shows that the activity is of **moderate intensity**; and finally if they are short of breath and not able to talk whilst moving (such as whilst running), this indicates that the activity is of **vigorous intensity**.

Any type of body movement produced by skeletal muscles which results in energy expenditure

Physical activity as defined by WHO

## Why should children and youths be encouraged to perform physical activity?

Physical activity in children and youths leads to better heart and lung health, as well as muscular endurance and bone strength. These are known to lower the risk of heart disease which starts developing during childhood. **Physical activity also helps prevent other chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes and osteoporosis.** Physical activity was found to contribute to better quality of sleep, reduces risk of depression in children and youths and is linked with better academic performance. It has also been found to enhance social skills such as sharing, communication, creativity and problem-solving.

### Benefits



Improved cognitive function



Better social skills



Reduced symptoms of depression



Better bone health



Better lung health



Better sleep



Better weight control



Better heart health

## Physical activity in children and youths

Physical activity in children and youths can either be in the form of **free unstructured play** or **structured activity**. Both types of play lead to the mentioned physical benefits, however free play (when children and youths engage in play which is not organised by an adult) helps children and youths to also develop their imagination, creativity and self-expression; whilst structured activities (which are intentionally led by an adult and children and youths engage in organised activities such as sport classes) help to develop social and problem-solving skills, integration, self-confidence and communication.

## How much physical activity should children and youths do?

**Children and youths between 5-17 years of age should engage in at least an average of 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous intensity, mostly aerobic, physical activity every day.** However, the more time spent being physically active (in vigorous-intensity physical activity) the better the health benefits. Children and youths should be encouraged to participate in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) which can be performed in shorter sessions leading to the accumulation of the recommended daily amount. Vigorous-intensity aerobic activities, as well as muscle and bone strengthening activities such as running and jumping, should be included within the activities at least 3 days a week.



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