

Teach Kids to Be Active

(Excerpt from the Floppy Sleep Game Book, by Patti Teel)
www.pattiteel.com

Physical activity is one of the simplest and most effective ways to help reduce stress and ensure that a child gets a good night's sleep. It releases both physical and emotional tension and has a positive effect on the neurotransmitters in the brain that affect mood. Unfortunately, the rise in childhood obesity is a telltale sign that many of our children are not getting adequate exercise. Children should have at least thirty minutes of moderate-intensity activity every day.

You can't assume that your child is getting an adequate amount of physical activity at school. Many schools have eliminated or cut back on their physical education programs and children who prefer more sedentary activities may not be physically active during recess. Some children are naturally active and get a great deal of exercise just by running around with their friends, riding their bikes and playing various games such as tag or kick ball. The very children who enjoy running around and playing actively are also likely to be interested in team sports and extracurricular sport's lessons. While your child doesn't need to be take formal lessons or be on a sports team, it is important that he takes part in physical activities that are enjoyable to him.

If your child is a reluctant exerciser, be a role model for an active lifestyle and find activities that you enjoy doing together. Use your imagination and try out a variety of activities such as bike riding, hiking, in-line skating or dancing. If you jog and your child is old enough, have him ride his bike alongside you so you can both get your exercise. If you don't feel it's safe for your child to walk to school and your schedule allows it, plan to walk to school together in the morning, or home in the afternoon. Young kids usually enjoy having a few extra minutes to spend walking and talking with Mom or Dad. It's also a good way to teach safety lessons about crossing the street and watching for cars that may be coming out of driveways.

Be sure that your child has the opportunity to play outdoors. Exposure to daytime sunlight has been shown to help children (and adults) to sleep better at night. If you don't have a big enough space for your child to play outdoors, take him to the park. At the end of an active day, you and your child will both be more likely to get a good night's sleep.

Although vigorous exercise is important, it should not be done within several hours of bedtime. Boisterous activities or vigorously exercising too late at night stimulates the body and raises the metabolic rate making it difficult for many children to relax. However, slow, sustained stretching and yoga is great to do before bed because it aids relaxation and prepares the body for a good night's sleep. It also helps kids to get out of their heads and into their bodies after a day of riding in cars, reading, being on the computer and watching TV.

- Try to ensure your that your child has at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise each day.
- Be a role model for an active lifestyle.
- Find fun, outdoor activities that you can do together as a family.
- Do slow, sustained stretches in the evening before bed.

Dubbed "The Dream Maker" by People magazine, Patti Teel is a former teacher and the creator of an award winning relaxation audio series for children. Her book, *The Floppy Sleep Game*, gives parents techniques to help their children relax, deal with stress and fall asleep. She is a popular speaker and presents innovative workshops for parents, children, and health professionals. Get R&R tips and sign up for her newsletter at www.pattiteel.com. You can listen to her online radio show at www.timeoutwithpattiteel.com.