



# Let children be active

The common perception used to be that small children are constantly moving. In reality, 80% of children do not get enough physical activity. The problem can be solved with daily choices. You are the best and most important person for getting your child more active.

[helsinkiliikkuu.fi](https://helsinkiliikkuu.fi)

Helsinki

# Small children do not get enough physical activity

*Small children explore the world around them through play and physical activity. Children reach for objects, climb on things and fall over all the time. In the minds of adults, small children are constantly moving. In reality, 80% of children do not get enough physical activity. The lack of physical activity is not caused by children not engaging in supervised sports – on the contrary, sporty hobbies are now more common than ever. The crux of the issue is that natural physical activity is no longer a part of our everyday life. Even children who exercise regularly are often not physically active enough, as for the most part, they spend their everyday life almost entirely stationary. The City of Helsinki has decided to address the problem of inactivity with 60 concrete measures.*

**We have compiled this material for your family to help you:**

## Recognise the problem

that the majority of small children do not get enough exercise

To find enjoyable, fun and affordable activities for your family visit

**[helsinkiliikkuu.fi](https://helsinkiliikkuu.fi)**

## Realise

that the key is to turn physical activity into daily routine

## Remember

that you are the best person for getting your child moving. Praise, encourage and enable!

## Understand

what it means in practice for children to get enough exercise

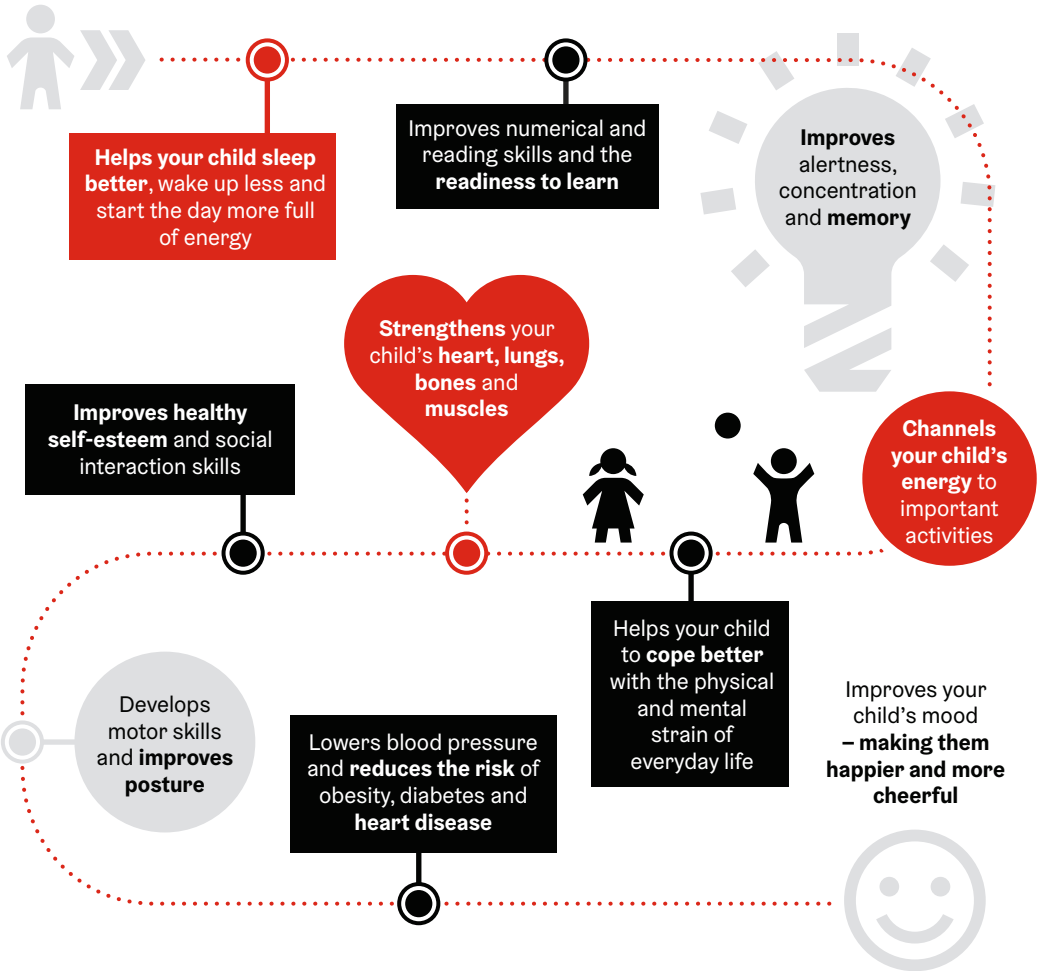
## Notice

that physical activity helps children fall asleep easier, improves their health and makes them happier

**Did you know that physical activity habits start forming as early as the age of three?**

# Physical activity is the best gift that you can give to your child

*Have you noticed that your child sleeps better after spending time outdoors? Is your child better-behaved after you've taken a family trip to your local forest? The importance of physical activity to a child's development and well-being is indisputable and has been proven in numerous studies. A physically active child is a happy child.*



Adults serve as examples for children and important enablers of physical activity.

# Three hours of physical activity every day – here's how to do it

*Children under the age of eight should be physically active for three hours every day. Many people wonder how this is possible in practice. Ensuring that children get enough exercise is only possible by changing prevailing, partly erroneous ways of thinking.*

**Erroneous ways of thinking about the physical activity of children:**

**“Daily chores, walking to daycare or play are not real exercise. They don't even make you break a sweat.**

Enough exercise does not mean three hours of sports, but rather two hours of light physical activity or active outdoor recreation on top of one hour of intense physical activity. All steps, physical effort and active games count and are important. You do not always need separate scheduling, equipment or transportation for physical activity. Exploring the local environment, playground activities, play, yard games or cycling to daycare all contribute to physical activity. Reducing sitting is important for a child's development and good for their health.

**“My child is always doing something. I'm sure she is physically active enough.**

There are naturally major individual differences between people's level of physical activity. Detailed research data shows that small children are not as physically active as we think. Everyday life has changed. Children spend surprisingly large amounts of time sitting in cars, in front of smart devices, in daycare centres and in prams. Many children do not engage in any intense physical activity during the day.

**“Our family's everyday life is so busy that there is no time for physical activity.**

Everyday life happens here and now – moments come and go. Can you make it to the daycare centre on time, will your clothes get wet from rain, how can you protect your child from bruises and how can you take the time to do household chores? Having the child sit down in the car, in a pram or with a smart device gives you momentary and even necessary breathers in your everyday life. However, there is also a downside. If all your everyday choices limit physical activity, they will have a negative impact on your child's health approximately 5–10 years down the line. Physical activity does not need to be an additional nuisance, it can also make everyday life easier. A physically active child will fall asleep faster, be in a good mood and be happier.

**“My child participates in instructed exercise twice a week. Surely that's enough.**

Supervised sports is important and enables children to learn new skills and have enjoyable activities in a social and safe environment. However, instructed exercise does not negate the need for independent physical activity. Children need to engage in diverse physical activity every day.



**1 hour  
of intense  
physical  
activity**



**2 hours of  
active outdoor  
recreation and  
light physical  
activity**



**3 hours**  
of varied physical  
activity  
every  
day

**One hour of intense  
physical activity a day:**

- We go to a playground where you can run, climb and participate in active games and play with other children.
- We go to a swimming hall or skiing.
- We reserve enough space in our home for our child's active play. Our child can bustle about and run around indoors.
- We ride bicycles in hilly terrain.
- We play tag with neighbouring families in the yard of our building.
- We go to an outdoor ice rink to play and skate.
- I take my child to participate in instructed exercise.

**Two hours of active outdoor  
recreation or light physical  
activity:**

- We ride bicycles or walk to the daycare centre.
- We use the stairs instead of lifts.
- We walk or cycle to the grocery shop.
- We take a trip to the local woods, park or nature trail.
- We walk the family dog together.
- We participate in our housing company's volunteer yard work or do yard work together as a family.
- We make a habit of engaging in balancing and acrobatics while watching TV.
- We get off the bus one stop earlier.
- We take a trip at the weekend.

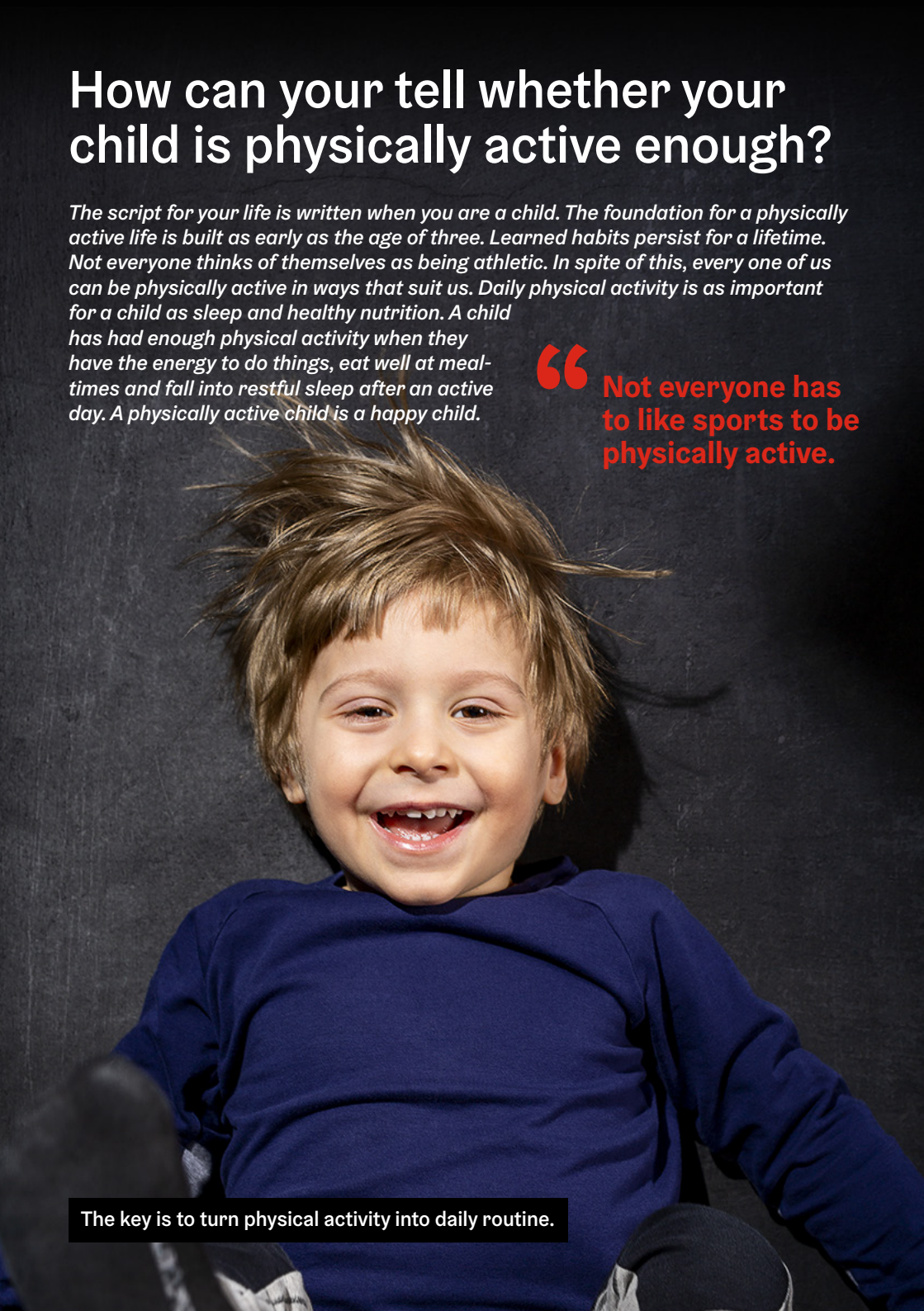
**INSTRUCTIONS FOR GETTING STARTED:**

- As a family, choose 1–2 concrete actions out of the physical activities listed above. More tips can be found at [helsinki.fi](https://helsinki.fi)
- Place the physical activity goal in a visible spot in your home. After a week, you can decide whether the activities you tried can become routine or come up with new activities. You're sure to find the right types of physical activity for you.
- Every action is worthy of praise. Don't worry if you don't always have the energy or if three hours seems impossible. It's a good idea to start easy.

# How can you tell whether your child is physically active enough?

*The script for your life is written when you are a child. The foundation for a physically active life is built as early as the age of three. Learned habits persist for a lifetime. Not everyone thinks of themselves as being athletic. In spite of this, every one of us can be physically active in ways that suit us. Daily physical activity is as important for a child as sleep and healthy nutrition. A child has had enough physical activity when they have the energy to do things, eat well at meal-times and fall into restful sleep after an active day. A physically active child is a happy child.*

“ **Not everyone has to like sports to be physically active.** ”

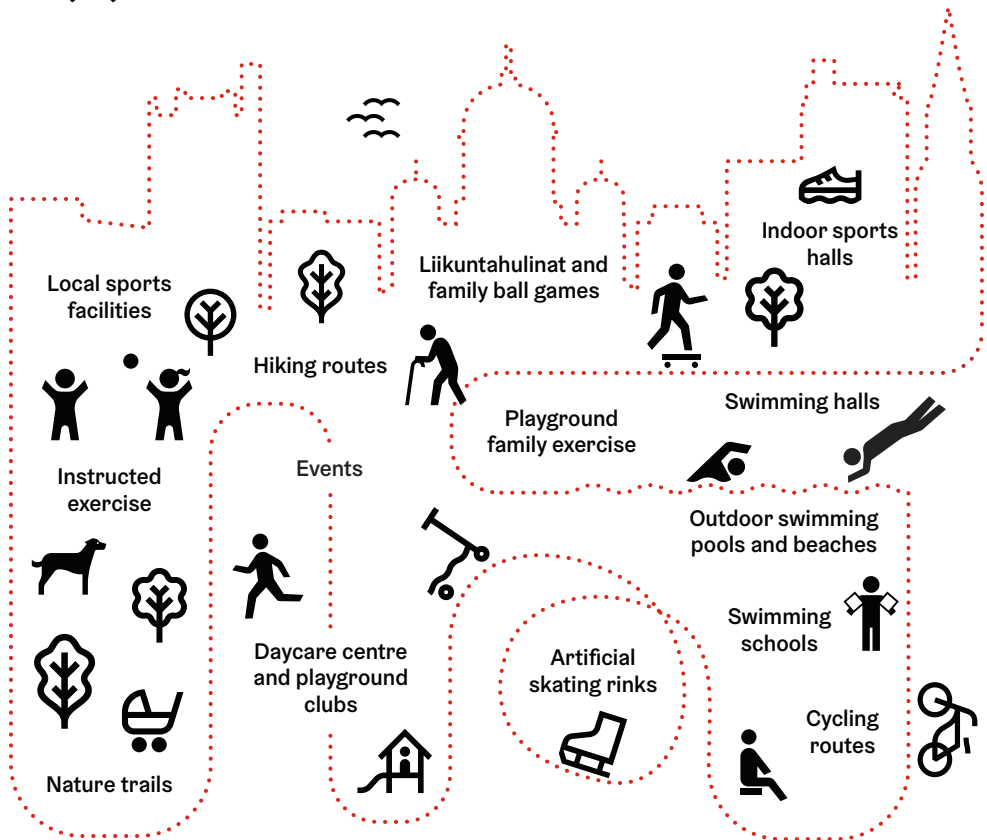


The key is to turn physical activity into daily routine.

# Everything about physical activity behind a single link

*Did you know that Helsinki's playgrounds offer daily supervised activities? Have you heard about the Liikuntahulinat spots events, at which families can exercise together? Have you discovered Helsinki's natural environments yet? Our city is full of free-of-charge and affordable opportunities for physical activity for the whole family. At [helsinkiliikkuu.fi](https://helsinkiliikkuu.fi), you can find all this and a wealth of information, tips and opportunities for incorporating physical activity into your everyday life.*

**Physical activity does not need to be expensive.**



Find your ways to be active at [helsinkiliikkuu.fi](https://helsinkiliikkuu.fi)  
Share your way of exercising #HelsinkiLiikkuu

# Helsinki is tackling physical inactivity

*Helsinki is investing in the physical activity of its residents in a new way that concerns the everyday lives of all city residents. Measures are being taken because most of us do not get enough exercise to maintain our well-being and spend too much time sitting down. There are currently nearly 60 measure in progress, with the aim of making physical activity an easy and attractive everyday choice for everyone.*

The Physical Activity Programme means the following, among others:



We engage in cooperation with maternity and child health clinics, daycare centres, playgrounds, sports services and home services for families with children to **increase opportunities for physical activity**



We will implement an **Activity ePass** for upper stage comprehensive school pupils



We make sure that all of Helsinki's **early childhood education and care units** join the **Physically Active Early Childhood Education and Care programme**



We will **expand** the inner city **cycling route network** by 75 kilometres and build new bike racks for 3,000 bikes by 2021



We **train** early childhood education and care and basic education **personnel in the promotion of a physically active lifestyle**



We will increase the use and **number of city bikes**



We will **improve the conditions for physical activity in ten school yards** with additional funding in 2019–2020



We will **develop physical activity during the working day** with a break exercise application and Liikkuva työpaikka (Workplace on the Move) activities



We fund the **development of recreational activities** for children and young people with **EUR 900,000** a year



We will **draw up a physical activity agreement** for at least 70 per cent of home care clients

No one can address the issue of physical inactivity alone or with a single trick. Physical activity is a goal shared by all of Helsinki.