

Physical activity guidelines for

EARLY YEARS (UNDER 5s) – FOR INFANTS WHO ARE NOT YET WALKING

1. Physical activity should be encouraged from birth, particularly through floor-based play and water-based activities in safe environments.
2. All under 5s should minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary (being restrained or sitting) for extended periods (except time spent sleeping).

Individual physical and mental capabilities should be considered when interpreting the guidelines.

Examples of physical activity that meet the guidelines

For infants who are not yet walking, physical activity refers to movement of any intensity and may include:

- ‘Tummy time’ – this includes any time spent on the stomach including rolling and playing on the floor
- Reaching for and grasping objects, pulling, pushing and playing with other people
- ‘Parent and baby’ swim sessions

Floor-based and water-based play encourages infants to use their muscles and develop motor skills. It also provides valuable opportunities to build social and emotional bonds.

For further information: *Start Active, Stay Active: A report on physical activity for health from the four home countries’ Chief Medical Officers (2011)*

Minimising sedentary behaviour is also important for health and development and may include:

- Reducing time spent in infant carriers or seats
- Reducing time spent in walking aids or baby bouncers (these limit free movement)
- Reducing time spent in front of TV or other screens

What are the benefits of movement?

- Develops motor skills
- Improves cognitive development
- Contributes to a healthy weight
- Enhances bone and muscular development
- Supports learning of social skills