



NHS

**Great Ormond Street
Hospital for Children**
NHS Foundation Trust

General Health Advice

This leaflet has important advice to help you and your family lead an active and healthy lifestyle. You can also access further information on the [GOSH website](https://www.gosh.nhs.uk)

[General health advice | Great Ormond Street Hospital \(gosh.nhs.uk\)](https://www.gosh.nhs.uk)

Food and Diet

Providing a good and balanced diet to your children is essential to helping them grow up strong and healthy. We should all be eating at least five pieces of fruit and vegetables a day as part of a healthy lifestyle. Eating a wide variety of fruit and vegetables can help you to get the most from your five portions.

More information can be found at [5 A Day - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

Food labelling can be confusing but there has been lots of work to make this simpler. You will often see food labels using the traffic light system. The green traffic lights indicate low salt, fat and sugar. You can have some food with traffic light labelling as long as it doesn't make up the majority of your diet.

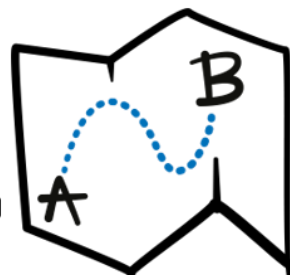
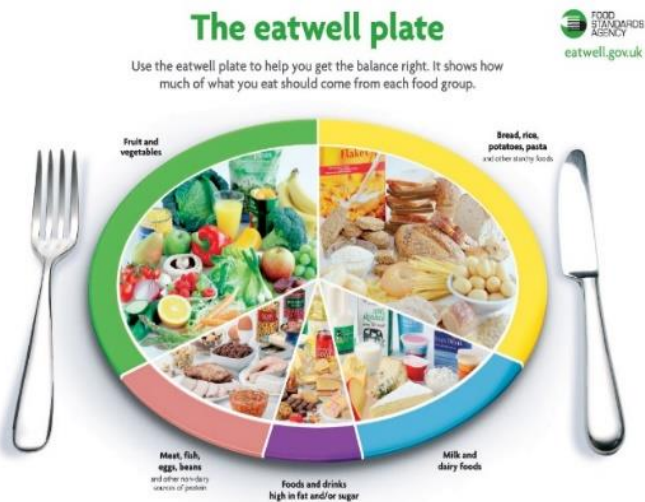
Planning meals in advance can be helpful and batch cooking can also be useful in busy household. You may also find the Eat Well plate for suggestions of what proportion of each food group you should eat at each main meal.

You can find more information at: [Eat smart | Great Ormond Street Hospital \(gosh.nhs.uk\)](https://www.gosh.nhs.uk)

Getting active

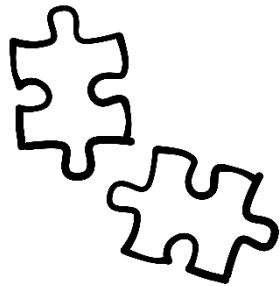
It does everyone good to be as active as possible – moving about keeps our body healthy, especially our heart, lungs and bones, as well as our mind. If your child has additional needs, it can be hard to think about what sport and exercise they can do but there are lots of options for accessible sport, exercise and activity.

Building movement into everyday activities is good for everyone. Activity helps our heart, lungs and bones stay strong but also helps our mental wellbeing as well. It can help with our sleeping and make us feel happier. Solo activities are helpful but team activities with other people can help build a common purpose and encourage working together and socialising.



What does your child like doing?

It's a good first step to start thinking about the things that interest your child. Are there particular books they enjoy, programmes they watch a lot or things they like to make. This should give you a few ideas of things to try.



Adapt and adapt some more

There are few activities that can't be adapted to meet someone's specific needs. There are often wheelchair versions of sports, specialist equipment to make something easier or other ways to tweak an activity to suit your child.

For example, instead of golf or football, your child could try to throw a beanbag towards a target. If they enjoy this, you could look for a boccia club nearby.

Try different things

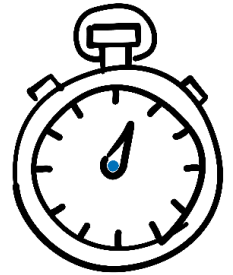
It can take some time to find an activity that suits your child – we all remember some sports from school we enjoyed less than others. Find various options for your child – you don't need to spend money on them at the start, so see what you can do for free before you commit yourself.

It doesn't have to be all in one go

Although children and young people are advised to be active for 60 minutes each day, they can split this into shorter chunks throughout the day if that's more manageable. Some mobile phone apps show active minutes or you could just make a note of how long your child spends being active each day.

It doesn't have to be competitive

Competition can be good for challenging yourself against someone else, but it can also be disheartening. Try to encourage self-improvement – that is, setting goals to reach – rather than competition with brothers, sisters or others. If you do want to build in a competitive element, you may have to adapt targets to give everyone a fair chance regardless of their age or ability.



Do things as a family

There are plenty of options for family activities that are suitable for all ages and abilities. See if there is something that all your children will enjoy – if they are all in the same place at the same time, this will make organising easier.

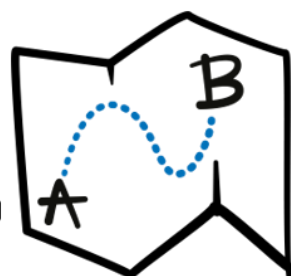
For example, lots of swimming pools do mixed ability sessions with plenty of aids and floats so everyone can join and play whatever their ability.

See what activities are available locally

There are lots of websites you can search to find activities close to home but your local public library can be helpful too. They usually keep directories of local activities and clubs so can point you towards some. Talk to your local team too – they will know which local activities their other patients have enjoyed.

Build activity into everyday life

As well as taking part in organised activities, see how you can build keeping active into everyday life too.



Could you get to school without a car one or two days a week for instance? Splashing about at bath time can be fun as well as exercising muscles. Put on some music and move about – it doesn't matter if you look silly, your child will probably prefer it if you do.

Look online for suggestions for exercises at home

There are plenty of websites that have exercise routines for all abilities and ages that you can easily do at home with no or very little special equipment. Have a look at the list at the end of this information sheet for suggestions.

Rather than using weights to lift, why not fill a bottle with water instead? You could also use a tin of beans if you can hold it with your hands.

Don't stop your child doing things for fear they'll hurt themselves

Of course you are bound to worry when your child does things you might think are dangerous or risky. However, so long as you follow your doctors' advice, use any safety equipment for the

activity and follow the rules, there are ways to include everyone in being active.

Please remember

- Keeping active doesn't always mean playing sports or going to the gym.
- Any activity that gets you moving, raises your heartbeat, makes you a bit sweaty or out of puff is a good thing.
- We should all aim for 60 minutes each day being active, but you can split this into shorter chunks if this is more manageable.
- Find an activity that your child enjoys – it's always harder to make yourself do something that you don't enjoy.
- Use activity as 'family time' that you can spend together. Schedule in your diary and stick to it!
- It doesn't matter what you look like or whether you are any good – being active and having fun are the most important things.

You can find more information at: [Exercise centre | Great Ormond Street Hospital \(gosh.nhs.uk\)](#)

Further information and support

Talk to your doctor, nurse, physio or occupational therapist for ideas to get your child moving. They can advise you about any safety concerns or specialised aids your child may need.

Change 4 Life has lots of ideas for activities, many of which are adaptable for all abilities and ages, on their website at www.nhs.uk/change4life/activities/accessible-activities.

Mencap Sport have various pages about sport, exercise and activity for people with learning disabilities – visit their website at www.mencap.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/mencap-sport for further details.

We Are Undefeatable encourages anyone with a long-term health condition to get active. There are lots more ideas on their website at weareundefeatable.co.uk/ways-to-move as well as information on activity for mental as well as physical health.



Access Sport is working to increase the number of people with additional needs taking part in sport – see their website at www.accesssport.org.uk for details. There are plenty of online video exercise programmes as well as low or no cost ideas for activities.

Get Yourself Active is a programme run by Disability Rights UK and Sport England to encourage activity if you have additional needs. More details are at www.disabilityrightsuk.org/how-we-can-help/get-yourself-active.

Activity Alliance is a charity that aims to increase activity levels for everyone with additional needs. Have a look at their website at www.activityalliance.org.uk/

British Blind Sport is an organisation that encourages anyone with a visual impairment to get active and take part in sports. See their website at britishblindsport.org.uk/ for further details.

Keeping active



Keeping active is good for your body.



It can make us feel happy too.



You can adapt lots of activities so you can do them – give it a try.



Try lots of different things until you find something you enjoy.



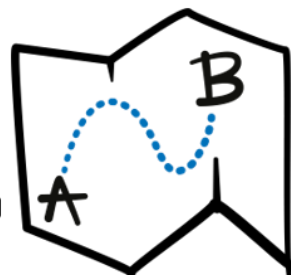
Try to be active for 60 minutes each day, but you can do it in short chunks.



Set challenges for yourself rather than against other people.



Think about fun activities you can do with your family.





Eat a healthy balanced diet with not too much fat or sugar.



Use equipment to protect yourself if you need to – it is important to keep safe.



The most important things are to get moving and have fun!

