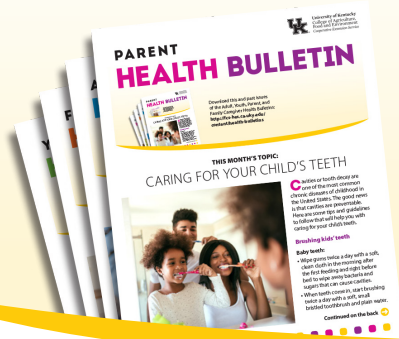


PARENT

HEALTH BULLETIN



APRIL 2025

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC

ENCOURAGE OUTDOOR PLAY



There are many reasons to look forward to spring and warmer weather. As a parent or caregiver of children, one reason can be how easy it is to get them outside to play. No more bulky snow suits or difficult gloves! Outdoor play is a great way for young people (and adults!) to burn energy, get exercise, and feel better. Children should play outside for many reasons, both physical and mental.

Here are some key benefits to outdoor play:

- 1. Physical health:** Outdoor play encourages physical activity. This helps children develop strength, coordination, and motor skills. It also helps combat childhood obesity by keeping them active and engaged in running, climbing, and playing sports.
- 2. Mental health:** Nature has been shown to lower stress, anxiety, and depression. The fresh air and natural environment promote relaxation. This helps children feel more balanced and calmer.

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- 3. Social skills:** Playing outside often involves hanging out with peers. This helps children develop critical social skills like teamwork, communication, and conflict resolution.
- 4. Creativity and imagination:** Outdoor play sparks creativity. Kids have more freedom to explore, invent games, and use their imaginations in a less structured environment. This fosters problem-solving and independent thinking.
- 5. Connection with nature:** Spending time outdoors teaches children to appreciate and care for the environment. It also helps them understand the world around them, from observing animals to noticing seasonal changes.
- 6. Better sleep:** Exposure to natural light during the day helps our bodies establish and maintain sleep and wake cycles. This leads to better sleep patterns and overall rest.
- 7. Reduced screen time:** Playing outside offers a healthy alternative to screen-based activities, which can lead to sedentary lifestyles and impact cognitive development if overdone.

In short, playing outside supports a child's physical, emotional, and mental growth, while offering many benefits that help them thrive!

If your child struggles with getting started playing outdoors, try one of these ideas:

- **Join them!** Children are more likely to play outside if their parents or caregivers are there with them. Go on walks, bike rides, or even relax in the backyard together.
- **Make the backyard or nearby park appealing:** Set up fun play areas with swings, climbing structures, or a sandbox. Add colorful outdoor toys like balls, jump ropes, and chalk for drawing if possible. Organize and store outdoor play toys where children can see and reach them.
- **Natural play areas:** Encourage exploration with natural materials like rocks, sticks, and leaves. You could offer a play prompt, like asking them to create a nature collection. They could do an outdoor scavenger hunt. Or give them resources to help identify different kinds of plants, bugs, and other natural wonders.

REFERENCE:

Yogman, M., Garner, A., Hutchinson, J., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2018). The power of play: A pediatric role in enhancing development in young children. *Pediatrics*, 142(3). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-2058>

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