

the kind you do over and over to keep bringing fresh oxygen to all of your muscles. When you do aerobic exercise and bring in that oxygen, your heart becomes stronger (and even a tiny bit bigger!). The number of blood cells in your blood increases, so the blood can carry even more oxygen. The blood in your body even moves more easily through the blood vessels. All these things mean that your body works better to keep you healthy, and you can play hard without getting worn out.

It's a good idea for kids to do some kind of aerobic exercise two or three times a week, for 20 to 30 minutes at a time. Bring on the oxygen by swimming, basketball, ice or roller hockey, jogging (or walking fast), in-line skating, soccer, cross-country skiing, biking and rowing. Even dancing, skipping and jumping rope are aerobic activities.

Try to move for 60 minutes every day. This can include your favorite aerobic activities and other moves like walking the dog or doing things around the house, like vacuuming, sweeping and raking leaves. You can even reach your 60-minute goal by moving for 10 minutes at a time throughout the day. Go for it!

REASON #4: Exercise Makes You Stronger

All the muscles in your body do a fine job when you use them for easy stuff, like picking up a book or walking down the stairs. But what about using them for harder stuff, like taking long bike rides, climbing a tree or carrying your backpack to class? That's where exercise comes in: it makes your muscles get stronger and sometimes larger. As your muscles get stronger, you can do more active things for longer periods of time. And strong muscles also help protect you from injuries when you play, because they give better support to your joints (where your bones meet).

Building up all different types of muscles is easy to do. For awesome arms, try push-ups, pull-ups, tug-of-war or twirling a baton. And don't forget the strength of the sea: rowing in a rowboat or canoe is great for building strong arm muscles. For strong leg muscles, try running, blading, skating and bike riding. And for strong stomach muscles (these are the muscles called "abs"—abdomen is a fancy word for the area below your rib cage), try some half sit-ups (with your knees bent and your feet on the floor), bike riding or even swirling a Hula-Hoop around your waist. Now that's fun!

REASON #5: Exercise Makes You Flexible

Can you touch your toes easily without yelling "ouch"? If so, you're pretty flexible, which means you can bend and stretch your body without too much trouble. But as people get older they tend to get less flexible, so that's why it's important to be active when you're a kid—to stay flexible. Plus, when you're flexible, you can play harder without having to worry about getting sprained and strained muscles.

It's easy to find things to do for good flexibility! Tumbling and gymnastics are great ways to become more flexible. And say "yes" to yoga. Don't forget dancing, especially ballet. And for fans of karate, tae kwon do and other martial arts, you're in luck: these sports are great for flexibility, you'll be feeling fine and having fun!

Reviewed by the Kidnetic.com Scientific Advisory Panel, 2002