



Daily outdoor activity is highly encouraged for toddlers and pre-schoolers. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

GUIDE FOR TYKES

A KKH-led team gives guidelines to help parents instil better habits from birth to improve their kids' well-being



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Avoid screen time during meal times and using food as a reward or to soothe.

These recommendations for toddlers are among a new set of guidelines rolled out after previous studies found that young children here are not getting enough sleep and have too much screen time.

The guidelines, by a work group led by KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH), are aimed at supporting parents to instil better daily habits from birth to improve their children's health and well-being in the long term.

The work group included doctors, allied health professionals, academics, educators and researchers.

Singapore's first set of integrated 24-hour activity guidelines for children under the age of seven outlines advice in four main areas – physical activity; sedentary behaviour; sleep; and diet and eating habits.

The report, released in January, noted that early childhood is a critical period for growth and adopting healthy lifestyle behav-

iours can impact habits later in life.

Dr Benny Loo, chairman of the workgroup, says it had made reference to several local studies in coming up with the guidelines.

A survey of 340 parents with children younger than the age of seven conducted by KKH from September to October last year reinforced the need for such guidelines, he adds.

The survey had shown a general lack of awareness of existing health guidelines and positive parenting practices, says Dr Loo, a consultant at KKH's general paediatrics service, and sport and exercise medicine service.

"Time allocated for physical activity, sleep and recreational screen-viewing time practices were sub-optimal in Singapore's young children, with more than half the parents either underestimating or overestimating the actual duration required for adequate physical activity and recreational screen-viewing time," he says.

The set of guidelines was developed by the KKH-led Integrated Platform for Research in Advancing Metabolic Health Outcomes of Women and Children. It is one of the main programmes by the SingHealth Duke-NUS Maternal and Child Health Research Institute.

Ms Carol Loi, a parenting and family coach and digital literacy educator, says young children take the lead from their parents.

Having a strong relationship with their child and being aware of the importance of role modelling can go a long way in shaping a child's development, she says.

"Parents can be intentional in using their time," she adds. For instance, parents can be mindful of how much time they spend on their devices, and what they eat in front of their kids.

A practical tip she gives for bedtime and screen-time struggles

is that children need time to transit from one activity to another.

"Moving from being awake and being asleep and vice versa is about change management. The body needs time to wind down, as well as to be active," she says.

Likewise, easing children out of a video or game they are highly engaged in takes time, she adds.

"Giving children advance notice may help. Let them know of the activities they will be doing after they stop using their screens."

If possible, use a larger tablet rather than a smartphone so it would be easier for parents to share a screen with their child and have meaningful conversations about what they are watching, she says.

Ms Loi also encourages parents to have realistic expectations, noting that every family has different needs and may be in different seasons of life.

"Balancing the need to be intentional in nurturing healthy habits in their children as well as the realities of life may not be easy."

Dr Loo acknowledges that the guidelines may seem daunting for parents at first.

"But once one can make this a way of life each day, it will become easier, more natural and you will reap bountiful benefits, both physically and psycho-emotionally," he says.

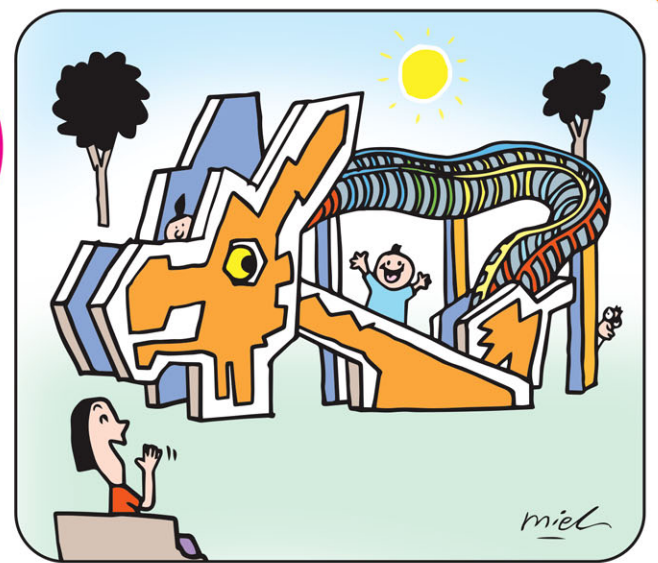
His advice is to start with one or any combination of the recommended behaviours, and adopt the practices as a family or with friends while encouraging one another.

The Straits Times sums up the key guidelines for parents on this page and C2.

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• For more details on the guidelines, go to www.ams.edu.sg/colleges/CPCHS/home

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



INFANTS (THE FIRST YEAR)

- Have at least 30 minutes of tummy time spread throughout the day. Gradually build up the time for those who are not yet mobile.
- This can go up to at least an hour spread throughout the day for infants above three months of age.

TODDLERS (ONE TO BELOW THREE)

- Aim for at least 180 minutes a day in a variety of physical activities at different levels of intensity. These should involve movements such as walking, running, crawling, climbing and balancing.
- Daily outdoor play is highly encouraged.

- Playtime has been associated with positive outcomes such as better sleep and developmental skills, as well as reduced risk for obesity.

PRE-SCHOOLERS (THREE TO BELOW SEVEN)

- Have at least 180 minutes of physical activity throughout the day. At least 60 minutes should be of moderate to vigorous intensity, where more is better.
- Pre-schoolers aged five to six should do a variety of age-appropriate vigorous-intensity play and engage in muscle- and bone-strengthening activities several times a week. These include running and climbing.
- Daily outdoor active play is highly encouraged.

CONTINUED
on C2

FROM C1

Guide for tykes



INFANTS (THE FIRST YEAR)

- Infants should not be restrained, such as in strollers or high chairs, and left unattended for more than an hour at a time.
- They should not have any screen time, including in the background, which can be distracting.
- When infants are seated, reclined or lying down, caregivers are encouraged to engage them in singing, reading, storytelling and imaginative play.

SEDENTARY BEHAVIOUR

TODDLERS (ONE TO BELOW THREE)

- Avoid restraining toddlers on a seat for more than an hour at a time.
- For those younger than 18 months, screen time, regardless of the type of device, is not recommended.
- For those aged 18 months and above, screen time should be limited to less than one hour a day.

PRE-SCHOOLERS (THREE TO BELOW SEVEN)

- Limit the total daily amount of sedentary behaviour, such as sitting or lying down.
- Limit recreational sedentary screen time to less than one hour a day.

TEXT: AMELIA TENG
ILLUSTRATIONS: MIEL



INFANTS (THE FIRST YEAR)

- Have a total of 14 to 17 hours of sleep for babies from birth to three months of age and 12 to 15 hours for those four to 11 months of age, including naps.
- Infants should sleep on their back in their own cot, in the same room as their caregivers, for safety.
- Parents can start developing regular bedtime routines when infants are two to three months old and provide a conducive sleep environment.

TODDLERS (ONE TO BELOW THREE)

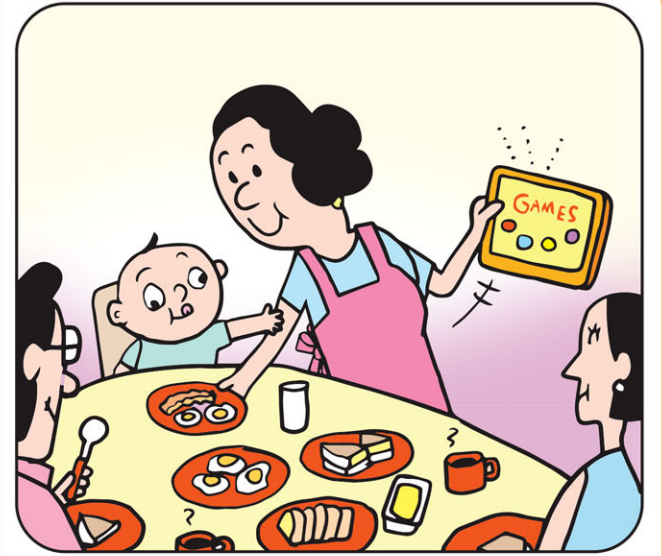
- Have a total of 11 to 14 hours of sleep, with regular sleep and

SLEEP

- wake-up times.
- Keep to a bedtime routine and timing, and in a conducive environment that is dark, quiet and of comfortable temperature.
- Avoid screen time 30 minutes before sleep at night.

PRE-SCHOOLERS (THREE TO BELOW SEVEN)

- Have a total of 10 to 13 hours of sleep for those aged three to five years, or nine to 11 hours from six years of age.
- Older pre-schoolers may not need to nap if they have slept enough at night.
- Keep to a consistent bedtime and routine, and avoid screen time 30 minutes before going to bed.



INFANTS (THE FIRST YEAR)

- Breastfeeding is recommended for infants where possible.
- From four to six months of age, babies can be introduced to solid foods of various textures and flavours, with no added salt and sugar.
- Have meals spaced two to three hours apart in the day to avoid overfeeding.
- Repeated exposure to a variety of items across the main food groups is necessary to help infants learn to accept different food types and take in a range of nutrients.

TODDLERS (ONE TO BELOW THREE)

- Continue to increase the

DIET AND EATING HABITS

variety of foods and wean off milk as the main source of nutrition.

- Introduce healthy family meals and offer whole milk and water, while

establishing a structured meal- and snack-time routine.

- Avoid screen time during meal times and using food as a reward or to soothe.

PRE-SCHOOLERS (THREE TO BELOW SEVEN)

- Eat healthily as a family, with caregivers as role models.
- Limit the amount and consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages.
- Have a structured routine for meal and snack times. Avoid screen time during meals.