



Play isn't just for kids. It's good for grown-ups, too. Sports, bike riding, hide-and-seek and a host of other games and activities in childhood were fun and let your imagination soar. You could enjoy time alone, too, with crayons, puzzles or building blocks.

But in adulthood, work and family commitments can make playtime for adults seem impossible and silly. However, research shows grown-up playtime can boost mental and physical health.

Benefits of adult play:

- Play triggers the release of endorphins. These natural, feel-good chemicals boost your mood.
- The social interaction of playing games with family and friends can relieve stress and depression.
- Play stimulates imagination and that can improve problem-solving abilities.
- Playing any type of sports as an adult can benefit physical and mental health.
- Research shows taking time for adult play can promote a sense of humor and a positive outlook on life.
- Play can boost social skills, improving relationships.

Ready to play? Stuart Brown, MD, psychiatrist, researcher and founder of the non-profit National Institute for Play defines play as a “state of mind that one has when absorbed in an activity that provides enjoyment and a suspension of sense of time.”

Be open to exploring different ways to play. Ask neighbors if they'd like to shoot some baskets at a local park, or play an impromptu ball game just for the fun of it. Enjoy painting or playing with clay as a kid? Devote time to making art just for the fun of it; join a local art group. Loved playing make-believe once upon a time? Visit local theatre productions and act out make-believe scenes with your children or grandchildren.

Top 10 Eating Habits

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Eating well is an important part of a healthy lifestyle. A balanced diet provides the nutrients you need for optimal health and disease prevention.

Here are ten tips for healthy eating:

- 1. Balance your plate:** Half of your meal should be vegetables and fruits, and a quarter should be whole grains. The remaining quarter should be protein-rich foods, such as fish, poultry or legumes.
- 2. Incorporate healthy fats:** Choose avocados, fatty fish, nuts, seeds and olive oil. These fats support brain health and aid in nutrient absorption.
- 3. Hydration matters:** Choose water most often and cut back on sugar-sweetened beverages, such as soda.
- 4. Listen to your body:** Pay attention to hunger and fullness cues. Eat when you're hungry and stop when you're satisfied, not stuffed.
- 5. Portion control:** Practice mindful eating by paying attention to portion sizes. Eat snacks in a single-serve bowl rather than from a family-size box or bag.
- 6. Colorful choices:** Opt for a vibrant array of fruits and vegetables. Different colors represent various nutrients, providing a broad spectrum of health benefits.
- 7. Limit ultra-processed foods:** Minimize your intake of foods with lots of added sugars, salt, additives and preservatives, such as baked goods, candy and chips.
- 8. Add some indulgence:** Completely avoiding ultra-processed food is unnecessary. Deprivation never works. Choose occasional treats and enjoy every bite.
- 9. Consider timing:** Maintain a consistent eating schedule with regular meals and snacks. This helps stabilize blood sugar levels and prevents overindulging at mealtimes.
- 10. Cook at home.** Homemade meals are a great option over takeout.



Adopting these eating habits contributes to overall well-being. Consistency is key, and small, sustainable changes can lead to a lifetime of healthy habits.



Adaptive Sports

Having a health condition or an impairment doesn't mean you can't participate in sports. In fact, adaptive sports — games with special rules, equipment and assistance — make it possible for many people with disabilities to play a variety of sports. Wheelchair basketball is one of the best-known examples of an adaptive sport. But there's also adaptive tennis, volleyball, archery, golf, fly-fishing, biking and other sports.

Participating in an adaptive sport on an even playing field builds teamwork, confidence, boosts social contact and increases quality of life. Research shows adaptive sport participation can strengthen the body, improve endurance and flexibility, reduce body fat and increase bone density, too.

If you are interested in participating in an adaptive sport, talk to your health care provider and your local parks and recreation department to find local programs appropriate for your disability. The U.S. Olympic Committee (teamusa.org) offers information on adaptive sports. And you can find adaptive sports programs nationwide at moveunitedsport.org/locations.

Special equipment is often needed, such as three-wheeler bikes, which rely on upper body movement, and wheelchairs adapted for sports with larger wheels and other features, such as anti-roll wheels in the back. Contact your insurance carrier and disability organizations for resources which may help with the cost. If you are a Veteran, visit va.gov to learn about grants for Veterans participating in adaptive sports.

Posture Pointers

Almost everyone remembers being told as a child to “stand up straight.” It turns out, that's good advice for life. By standing up straight, you center your weight over your feet – and your body functions best when properly aligned.

Good posture is important for balance, helping you avoid falls and strengthening your abilities in sports. In fact, good posture helps you perform everyday activities, such as lifting packages and housework, without back strain. What's more, your posture helps with non-verbal communication. If you're slumped, head down, you may come across to others as shy or not interested in what others are saying. But if you are standing or sitting straight, the odds are you'll appear confident.

How to check your standing and sitting posture:

- For standing posture, use a full-length mirror.
- Your chin should be parallel to the floor — not up or down.
- Are your shoulders even?
- Your spine should be in a neutral position (not overarching, forward or backwards).
- Arms at your side should be even, hips should be even and both knees should point straight ahead.



Good sitting posture is important, too, and can help you avoid neck and back pain.

- Keep your chin parallel to the floor.
- Make sure hips, knees and shoulders are even.
- Your knees and feet should point ahead.

If your posture needs improving, get moving. Harvard experts note posture can be improved with a few simple, regular balance-specific workouts that build core strength and loosen tight muscles. Pilates and yoga are examples that can help.

Q: Signs of stress in children?

— Eric Endlich, PhD

A: **We all experience stress at times,** but children face different challenges and usually have fewer coping strategies. Stress in children may be a result of feeling overwhelmed by school demands, bullying by peers or anxiety about situations at home.

Common signs of stress in children include:

- Return of old habits (e.g., bedwetting, thumb sucking).
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Nightmares.
- Withdrawal or clinginess.
- Appetite changes.
- Head or stomach pain.
- Worsening school performance.
- Aggression or outbursts.

Here are some ways to help your children manage their stress:

- Maintain or resume routines.
- Laugh and play together.
- Give them space to talk, and listen without judging.
- Remain calm, even if they're acting out.
- Give them opportunities to make their own choices.
- Check in with their teachers.
- Consult with their health care provider, who can provide referrals to mental health professionals.
- Check their online activities and for any sign of cyberbullying.



The **Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **3 Exercise Claims You Can Ignore**, is at personalbest.com/extras/24V4tools.

4.2024