

# Physical activity guidelines for

## EARLY YEARS (UNDER 5s) – FOR INFANTS WHO ARE NOT YET WALKING

1. Physical activity should be encouraged from birth, particularly through floor-based play and water-based activities in safe environments.
2. All under 5s should minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary (being restrained or sitting) for extended periods (except time spent sleeping).

*Individual physical and mental capabilities should be considered when interpreting the guidelines.*

### Examples of physical activity that meet the guidelines

For infants who are not yet walking, physical activity refers to movement of any intensity and may include:

- ‘Tummy time’ – this includes any time spent on the stomach including rolling and playing on the floor
- Reaching for and grasping objects, pulling, pushing and playing with other people
- ‘Parent and baby’ swim sessions

Floor-based and water-based play encourages infants to use their muscles and develop motor skills. It also provides valuable opportunities to build social and emotional bonds.

For further information: *Start Active, Stay Active: A report on physical activity for health from the four home countries’ Chief Medical Officers* (2011)

Minimising sedentary behaviour is also important for health and development and may include:

- Reducing time spent in infant carriers or seats
- Reducing time spent in walking aids or baby bouncers (these limit free movement)
- Reducing time spent in front of TV or other screens

### What are the benefits of movement?

- Develops motor skills
- Improves cognitive development
- Contributes to a healthy weight
- Enhances bone and muscular development
- Supports learning of social skills