Physical Activities for Children with Autism
By Maggie New

Every child profits from exercise if it is fun. Every child needs exercise, and children with autism are no exception. In fact, children with ASD, physical exercise can have additional behavioral benefits if certain precautions and techniques are used. All the usual gross motor activities of running, walking, jumping, cycling and others can be engaged in and enjoyed by children with autism.

Negative Affects

Because children with autism relate to their environment differently than other children, engaging in physical activity in an environment they are not used to can be scary to them. For instance, wide-open spaces might be disorienting, and loud noises -- quite common in a gym -- can startle autistic children. As a result, your autistic child might display behaviors like toe-walking, flapping hands or angry outbursts, among other things, in these environments.

Preventing Melt-Downs

It is possible to preempt or at least reduce acting-out behaviors by preparing your child in advance. "Palaestra," a journal on physical education for people with disabilities, suggests communicating with your child about what to expect. Be creative and adapt the activities to your child's needs. For instance, since autistic children often have a short attention span, avoid long periods with the same activity. Preparing for transitions ahead of time by letting
your child know in advance may prevent tantrums. Also, initially focus on the modality your child prefers, which helps prevent sensory overload.

**Expected Behavior Changes**

Studies have shown that five to eight minutes of aerobic activity reduces self-stimulating behavior, according to the Pediatrics & Child Health website. In addition, "Palaestra" reports that children with autism who had physical activities added to their traditional behavior management plan exhibited an increase in attention, an increase in on-task behavior and an increase in the level of correct responses.

**Games to Play**

Children with autism also get benefits from physical activities that involve small-motor skills, such as games that require touching objects, interacting by taking turns, making eye contact -- something autistic children often find uncomfortable -- and learning to tolerate non-solid textures, like paint. Some games you can play, together with other kids or one on one, include follow the leader; hide and seek; painting; preferably with fingers; and the grab-bag game during which fun items are placed inside a bag and your child feels for them and tries to guess what they are.

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Reprinted from LiveStrong.com
Good Behavior in Yoga Group

Good behavior in Yoga Group means:

- I stay on my yoga mat
- I listen with my ears
- I watch what my yoga teachers are doing
- I try my best to do each yoga activity
- If I need help, I can ask a yoga teacher for help
- If I need a break, I can sit quietly on my yoga mat
- I use a quiet voice
- I keep my hands to myself

When I use good behavior in yoga group, the other children are happy because it is easier to see and hear the teacher.

It makes my yoga teachers happy when I use good behavior in yoga group. 😊

I will try to use good behavior in yoga group.
Dancing – and Constantly Growing — with Autism

OK, so today has been my days for multiple appointments: doctors, dentist, Apple one-to-one, exercise, lecture. And in between, in the fractional hours when it’s easier to stop at a cafe than to drive home, I’ve been collecting my thoughts…

Next week I’ll start my 7th month of teaching dance to 16 students with autism, without the help of extra time for planning or professional development. Fortunately, we’ve come a long way, with me grateful for every stray scrap of advice and inspiration that’s come my way. Thanks especially to a small email network of colleagues who are venturing along the same path, as well as a couple good books (by Temple Grandin & Ellen Notbohm).

I work with two classes of 8 students, one with 1st-3rd graders and the other with kindergarten-1st graders. The two classes are so different ~ the older group having developed some skills in verbal & visual communication, while the younger groups are just learning to communicate!

So, where have we gone in our explorations…? The older group can venture in many directions now, each child in his or her own way. What keeps us going best is the usual delicate balance between familiar routines, new & exciting props, and gradual challenges.

Explorations that have succeeded and continue to grow include:

- The Brain Dance: First thing each day we progress through the coordination patterns of the Brain Dance, often using the prop of the day (foam bats, stretchy bands, body bags).
- Taking turns: We use short foams bats as clappers and have clapping conversations one-on-one. Depending on the child, I still say “my turn/your turn,” or I ask the child to initiate the conversation, or the child responds to my initiation. None of the students need an instructional assistant to guide their hands anymore, and one boy is very adept at copying my rhythm. They also take turns on…
- Following a pathway: They’ve progressed from picking up the plastic marker spots and flapping them against the floor on to over each spot on the way across the floor. I’ve added hula-hoops-in-stands for crawling through along the way, and lately they’ve been practicing jumping over cardboard boxes (instead of stomping on them).
- Beach balls: All but two of the kiddos have learned to blow up and deflate their own beach ball – and are motivated to do it even when it’s hard and takes a while! Once the beach balls are inflated, we do the Brain Dance, a Freeze Dance, solo toss-and-catch, one-on-one toss-and-catch (with me… not with each other so far), solo dribbling with our feet, and toss-through-a-hoop or into-a-bucket.
- Foam bats: Brain Dance, Clapping Conversations (see Taking turns above), rhythmic patterns with music.
- Body sox: Boy, are these ever a hit! They’ve all learned to lay them out to insert their feet like a sleeping bag. Using the bags, we’ve explored body parts (feeling them push from inside the bag), levels, shapes, smooth & sharp energy, and stationary/(carefully!) traveling moves. At first, I taught them to keep their head out, but as they’ve grown familiar with the body sox, I let them choose — head in or out. The kids are even getting used to folding them when we’re done.
- Hullabaloo: This is an extension of an electronic game one of their teachers had. Instead of the little spot-markers in the game, we use brightly colored plastic circles, and instead of the electronic directions (that are fast and hard-to-understand), I call & demonstrate different ways to travel from one color-spot to another, using whatever concept I’m emphasizing for the day (body parts, locomotor skills, levels, directions, shapes…).
- Percussion instruments: We practice starting & stopping on cue (stopping is a vague concept for some of them!), beating a match-the-words rhythm (“Pizza, I like pizza, pepperoni pizza, and cheese!” with “shhh” and a “quiet” gesture of a finger to the lips on pauses between the words), and taking turns playing solos ~ as well as let-it-rip play-as-you-like intervals.
• Yoga: Using pictures, we have a progression that starts standing and ends with the “Do Nothing Doll” ~ with each of them lying down while I circulate to gently lift and shake their relaxed arms as a way of saying goodbye each day.

We all still suffer some from Carter’s screaming tantrums whenever things don’t quite follow his expectations (some weeks it happens every day), or Aldrin’s obsession with aggravating Spencer by touching & poking him. But each week we work together now I’m delighted to see their improvement — with gratitude for the consistent support of their instructional aids (always with us) and the work of their classroom teacher — it’s great to see them dance & grow!

Reprinted from dancepulse.org

Homemade Bird Feeders with Cheerios & Blueberries

Ingredients:
Pipe Cleaners    Cheerios    Blueberries    Raffia or Ribbon

Bend one end of each of the pipe cleaners so the fruit and cheerios wouldn’t slide off. Then thread the berries and cereal onto the pipe cleaners. Twist the ends together and bend the feeders into circles and hearts. Tie a long length of raffia or ribbon to each feeder and tie a bow. Then take them out into the yard and hang them from the trees.

Trail Mix Ideas

Trail mix was invented (according to legend, in 1968 by Hadley Food Orchards) to be eaten while hiking or doing another strenuous activity. It’s lightweight, portable, and full of energy-dense ingredients like dried fruit, nuts, and chocolate—perfect for trailside noshing. For those same reasons, trail mix can pack a hefty caloric punch, especially when we mindlessly munch while sitting around at work or home. Keep serving size to a quarter-cup or less to keep this yummy snack from sneaking into “danger food” territory.
Mix ‘n’ Match — The Ingredients

Nuts

These pint-sized nutritional dynamos are loaded with healthy unsaturated fats, protein, fiber, antioxidants, vitamin E, and other essential vitamins and minerals.

- Whether they’re raw or roasted, go for unsalted, unsweetened nuts to keep sugar and sodium under control.
- Our healthy favorites: Almonds, pistachios, cashews, peanuts, and walnuts. Higher-calorie macadamia nuts, hazelnuts, Brazil nuts, pecans, and pine nuts are also good options in moderation.

Seeds

- For those with nut allergies (or just looking to mix things up), seeds provide many of the same nutritional benefits as nuts. Hemp seeds, for example, are loaded with omega-3 fatty acids, gamma linoleic acid, protein, zinc, iron, magnesium, potassium, phosphorus, and calcium.
- Sprinkle a handful of pumpkin, sunflower, sesame, flax, or hemp seeds in trail mix for an extra boost of nutrients.

Dried Fruit

- This sugary treat can easily become a danger food, so pay attention to the ingredient list and serving sizes. In moderation, dried fruit can be a great source of fiber, antioxidants, calcium, and vitamins A, C, and K.
- Look for dried fruit options with as little added sugar and preservatives as possible (some varieties, like cranberries, are naturally quite tart and almost always sweetened with cane sugar or apple juice). It’s also pretty easy to make your own dried fruit at home in the oven.
- Our Favorites: Dried apples, cherries, cranberries, goji berries, blueberries, strawberries, apricots, raisins, banana chips, figs, pineapple chunks, mango, and dates.

Grains

- Add some complex carbohydrates to your custom blend for extra fiber, which boosts overall energy and helps to keep you full.
- Choose whole grains whenever possible and avoid highly processed cereals that add unnecessary sugar and sodium.
- Shredded wheat cereal, pretzels, whole-grain cereals like Cheerios or Chex, bran flakes, whole-wheat crackers, granola, toasted oats, puffed rice cereal, and air-popped popcorn can all add a little bit of crunch.

Sweets

- Sometimes we all need a little something sweet to round out the mix. Just remember to add treat-like options sparingly (unless you’re making dessert instead of a snack).
- Add a sprinkling of M&Ms, chips of various kinds (chocolate, peanut butter, carob, butterscotch), cacao nibs, yogurt-covered raisins, chocolate-covered coffee beans, mini marshmallows, or chocolate-covered nuts. When going the chocolate route, choose dark varieties for extra antioxidants.

Savory Extras

- Once the building blocks are all set, adding spices is a great way to change up the flavor a bit. Season the mix with sea salt, curry, ground ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, cardamom, or cayenne pepper. Or create your own mix of spices.
• Keep taste buds guessing with wasabi peas, coconut flakes, sesame sticks, dried ginger, and coffee beans.

Kathy Johnson’s Favorite Mix
Cashews
Dried Cherries
Popcorn
Dark Chocolate M&Ms

Cathy Gladstone’s Favorite Mix
Pistachios
Pumpkin Seeds
Dried Cranberries
Pretzels

Anne’s Favorite Mix
Pistachio
Sunflower Seeds
Dried Cranberries
Wheat Chex
Chocolate Chips
Plain M&Ms

Anne’s Trail Mix

The ASM Staff made Anne’s Trail Mix in the ASM Office on Friday, February 6th, YUM!

Caterpillar Grape Kabobs

**Ingredients**

1 bunch green grapes
Handful bamboo skewers
1 container of white frosting
1 package mini chocolate chips

**Directions**

Rinse your grapes then slide them onto your skewer until it is filled up with grapes. With your frosting, place two small dots in place of the eyes and then stick a mini chocolate chip in the middle of the frosting.

**FUN & DELICIOUS! ENJOY!**
Please visit Amazon.com to view this book and for more information: http://amzn.com/1849059985


AUTHOR: Geslak, David S.


PUBLICATION DATE: 2015  NUMBER OF PAGES: 163

One of the major disadvantages of the Internet age is that kids are sitting in front of computers and smartphones for hours on end checking email, Facebook status notifications and playing games, instead of engaging in healthy, outdoor exercise such as taking a walk, riding a bike or even going for a swim in the lake. This is an even bigger problem for children and teens on the autism spectrum who are not only caught up in the sedentary culture, but who must deal with sensory processing issues, difficulties with motor planning and coordination and social and communication difficulties which make playing in team sports difficult and confusing.

As a result children and teens (and adults, too!) aren’t getting the physical activity they need to prevent diabetes and heart disease and to stay healthy into their later years. Until now, there hasn’t been a good way to help encourage them to engage in physical activity. David S. Geslak, the Founder and Director of Exercise Connection Corporation, has devised a plan that would accommodate the needs of kids with ASD so that they can exercise.

The Autism Fitness Handbook is divided into four sections: Engage, Educate, Empower and Exercise. In the first section, the author describes basic concepts in instilling the importance of exercise and establishing a program for one’s child, such as speaking up at PTA meetings about the importance of being physically active, using visual supports, being a good role model, being patient and motivating the child. In section two, Educate, the author describes the five basic components of physical fitness: Body Image, Posture, Motor Coordination, Muscular Fitness and Cardiovascular Fitness, but infuses this with more updated information that he feels would better serve kids on the autism spectrum. In addition, he describes how to set up an exercise program, including the use of visuals, such as charts, to help the child count the number of times one must do a certain exercise in a set. For example, in my physical therapy sessions for my broken shoulder, I am doing two sets of “Chicken Wings”, with ten of them in each set. The author also describes the use of a “First-Then” board; he provides illustrations so that the reader understands how to design and use them.

In the third section, Empower, Geslak includes stories about his Champions-kids with ASD who have been able to develop a successful fitness routine with the right supports. There are visuals along with each story so that the reader can see how that can be done and can follow one of the examples.

In the last, but most important section, the author includes exercises that are divided into sections that correspond with the five components described earlier in the book. All in all, I feel that this is an important step forward in getting Johnny or Janey with ASD off the couch and into the gym, the pool or the backyard!
WEBSITE REVIEW: The Autistic Me

http://theautisticme.blogspot.com/

Anne Carpenter

I have been impressed by the increasing number of blogs being written by adults with ASD who tell it like it is and this one is one of the good ones. C.S. Wyatt, the author, is an adult with ASD who writes about being a university professor while experiencing the difficulties and the advantages that autism confers. What is unique about the author is that he teaches the arts, rather than following the stereotype of people with ASD teaching and working in the STEM fields. In one post, he does express regret about not teaching in the STEM fields and that he should have kept the arts as a hobby. He describes how his experience with autism makes it difficult for him to pick up on the social cues his students display and how that affects his ability to teach. In addition, he is painfully honest about his high level of anxiety and perfectionism and how things have to be perfect at all times despite knowing that this isn’t possible.

In the section where he describes himself, he tells the reader what schools he graduated from and about his doctorate degree and his thesis about teaching writing to students with ASD. I was impressed that he went off the beaten track, teaching in the arts instead of the usual science and math fields. This means that he was willing to deal with a field of study that is less concrete and has many more nuances-no small feat!

The range of topics covered in this blog is broad and comprehensive. The author covers the gamut from sensory issues to anxiety and OCD, to teaching, to the joys of playing solitaire, and to relationships (he is married). He writes about the vagaries of everyday life that, while trivial to most people, can trip up even the most capable of people with ASD. A case in point was his frustration when trying to find the right medication for his iron deficiency. The blogs are chronological, but one can go through the archives, to find older posts. Then, the reader can see how things were for him just a few years ago.

One has to admire C.S. Wyatt’s perseverance in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds; teaching complex subjects as a college professor and holding a marriage together while experiencing sensory overload, anxiety and health problems at the same time. Many other people would crash and burn trying to do this juggling act, but for some reason he seems to succeed. Bravo to him!
P.E. Class Routine

Warm-Up Activity with Class

Stretch on your number

Listen to your Teacher

Participate with your classmates

Follow the rules of the game

Check Schedule
OUT AND ABOUT: Being Physically Active Feels Great!
By: Anne Carpenter

As with many other people on the autism spectrum, I have found that if I don’t exercise for more than two days, I feel wiggly, restless and just plain lousy. This is because exercise balances the nervous system and releases wonderful, feel-good chemicals called endorphins, which make one feel calmer and happier. I don’t play in competitive sports, so I often take long walks—either to Gallup Park, near where I live, by walking down a lovely wooded path, or walking home from doing errands in Ann Arbor, such as a trip to the bank or from the Quaker Meeting. Or, I go swimming in the little pool at Huron Towers, during the summer.

In the winter or when the weather is bad, I work out in the little fitness center at the other end of the lobby that has two treadmills, a stationary bicycle, and a Nautilus weight system. Recently, I visited relatives in Sarasota and we walked through Selby Gardens, an absolutely gorgeous botanical garden, with winding trails and exotic plants everywhere, in 70-degree weather. What a pleasure that was! But early in December, I fell and fractured my shoulder bone, so I am sidelined from physical activity, until my arm heals, because I can’t use the exercise equipment and the weather has been too cold for taking long walks. I have been feeling OK, but I miss the exercise and am so looking forward to a fully-healed shoulder and better weather (or another trip to Florida!), so that I can once again, reap the wonderful benefits of physical activity! I really miss doing this and I’m looking forward to going back to an exercise routine and feeling like a million bucks afterward, just like I used to do!
Save the Dates

Saturday, May 16th, 2015
ASM Annual 5k Run/Walk
Hawk Island Park
Lansing, MI
To register go to: Click Here to Register

Monday, October 16th, 2015
ASM Fall Conference
Featuring Speaker: Paula Kluth
Grand Valley State University
Grand Rapids Campus
The Autism Society of Michigan
Presents:
Life Solutions for Autism
Parent Empowerment Workshop

“How to Develop Your Child’s SELF Skills”

Saturday, April 25, 2015
9:00am – 4:00pm
Check-in Begins at 8:30 a.m.
(A continental breakfast & boxed lunch will be provided)

Foster Community Center - Room #213
200 N. Foster Street, Lansing, MI

Learn how you can develop your child’s SELF Skills at home and school!
SELF = Self-Empowerment for Lifelong Fulfillment
► Self-Advocacy  ► Self-Determination
► Problem Solving  ► Goal Setting

This workshop is designed for parents and caregivers of individuals (ages 2 through 18+) with Autism. You will learn the importance of developing your child’s SELF Skills and how these skills directly impact a person’s ability to live an independent life. You will also learn simple strategies that can be used at home and in the community to develop your child’s skills on a daily basis. We will discuss the importance of working with your educational team to ensure the development of your child’s SELF Skills at school. You will also create a Personal SELF Skills Development Plan so that you can begin applying these strategies day one!

Presented By:
Karin Chandler
Life Solutions for Autism
Founder and Life Quality Consultant
Karin has over 20 years of personal and professional experience helping families overcome the many challenges associated with Autism. She has developed ASD programs and services with advocate school districts and universities.

Kathy Johnson
Past President of Autism Society of MI
& Parent Advocate
Kathy was a Special Education teacher for 17 years with ASD population. Kathy is an Independent Educational Consultant, Advocate and Training Specialist. Volunteers daily at the Autism Society of Michigan.

Cost: $10 per person. Please register by April 22th & return with payment to:
Autism Society of MI, 2178 Commons Parkway, Okemos, MI 48864

You may call 517-882-2800 or email: asminr@autism-mi.org to register.

Name: ___________________________ Phone: ___________________________
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Age of Your Child: ________ Amount Enclosed: $________
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In Memory of Taylor Allen:
Jeff & Tina Dix
Greg & Emily Bosma
Michael & Kim Dix
O’Mara’s Restaurant
Sue Pace/William Beaumont Hospital

In Memory Yani Calmidis
George & Penny Besculides
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The Gifted Center for Autism
Sandra Glovak/Sensory Systems Clinic
John & Barbara Laird
Roger Lauer
Marta Lazar
Our Mission
The mission of the Autism Society of Michigan (ASM) is to assure full participation and self-determination in every aspect of life for each individual. We will realize this vision by opening avenues of self-advocacy and advocating on behalf of others in a way that values equity, respect, dignity and diversity in all communities.

Your “Spring Horizons” Has Arrived!

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