The Couch Potato Challenge

Fitness Activities For 4-H Youth Development Programs
Dear 4-H Leader:

This manual was designed for you! Physical fitness is a very important health issue impacting youth today. Youth are experiencing a declining fitness level due to increased television watching and other sedentary activities. The goal of this manual is to provide information about physical fitness and hands-on fitness activities to use with youth.

You can help promote physical fitness by including these simple and easy to use fitness activities in club meetings, camps, school programs or any other setting that includes youth. Help young people take the Couch Potato Challenge and engage in more physical activity!

There are activities in this manual for both individuals, and small and large groups of youth of all ages. Very little preparation time is required and most activities require no or very few materials. All the activities get kids moving while they’re having fun!

Safety is a key component with any physical activity. It is important that you help maintain a safe environment where youth are not harmed as a result of participating in the activities.

Health is the fourth “H” in the 4-H Clover (head, heart, hands, health) and 4-H Youth Development Programs is enhancing health programs and outreach to youth. Thank you for helping promote this important program!

Sincerely,

4-H Youth Development Staff
How Physically Fit Are American Youth?

Young people can build healthy bodies and establish healthy lifestyles by including physical activity in their daily lives. However, many young people are not physically active on a regular basis and physical activity declines dramatically during adolescence. Healthy People 2010, an initiative by the Department of Health and Human Services, identify ten indicators reflective of the major health concerns in the United States (i.e., tobacco use, injury and violence, immunization). At the top of the list, however, is physical activity.

Though national health goals call for daily physical education for all school children, many youth are not enrolled in any type of physical education program. Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher called physical inactivity in the United States a “major epidemic” in the United States and stated, “I think we’ve made a serious error by not requiring physical education in grades K-12”.

What Are the Benefits of Physical Activity?

Regular physical activity in childhood and adolescence promotes a number of positive health indicators:

• Improves strength and endurance
• Helps build healthy bones and muscles
• Helps control weight
• Reduces anxiety and stress and increases self-esteem
• May improve blood pressure and cholesterol levels

(Center for Disease Control (CDC), 2000)

Children and adolescents who are at least moderately physically active for 30 minutes or more per day on 5 or more days of the week can experience these health benefits. In addition, young people say they like physical activity because it is fun; they do it with friends; and it helps them learn skills, stay in shape, and look better (CDC, 2000).

Conclusions

In an era where schools are less able to offer physical education, community programs can help bridge the gap by promoting fitness activities.

“Without health and fitness, wealth is without value, knowledge is useless, art cannot become manifest, and music cannot be played.” (Herophilus, 300 BCE). Collectively, we can develop, maintain, and offer programs that will help youth adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles that will benefit individuals and society.
Examples of Moderate Amounts of Activity

Less Vigorous, More Time

Washing and waxing a car for 45-60 minutes
Washing windows or floors for 45-60 minutes
Playing volleyball for 45 minutes
Playing touch football for 30-45 minutes
Gardening for 30-45 minutes
Wheeling self in wheelchair for 30-40 minutes
Walking 1 ¾ miles in 35 minutes
Basketball (shooting baskets) for 30 minutes
Bicycling 5 miles in 30 minutes
Dancing fast (social) for 30 minutes
Pushing a stroller 1 ½ miles in 30 minutes
Raking leaves for 30 minutes
Walking 2 miles in 30 minutes
Water aerobics for 30 minutes
Swimming laps for 20 minutes
Wheelchair basketball for 20 minutes
Basketball (playing a game) for 15-20 minutes
Bicycling 4 miles in 15 minutes
Jumping rope for 15 minutes
Running ½ miles in 15 minutes
Stairwalking for 15 minutes

(CDC,2001)

More Vigorous, Less Time
Fitness Activities

And the Beat Goes On……
Materials –  Large room or open space outdoors
          Music
          Microphone (optional)

Ask volunteers or talented 4-Hers to lead dance instructions. Try something new like
Latin samba, Russian folk, clogging, Polish Polka, swing, country line, or ballroom
dancing. Good instructors will help make sure participants learn proper techniques so
they are successful! Dancing is fun and good exercise – participants don’t even realize
they’re working out!

The ABCs of Exercise
Materials -  None

How do you create every letter in the alphabet using just the bodies of 4-Hers? While
participants wiggle, squirm and problem solve, they are also getting good exercise –
enhancing flexibility, agility, strength and awareness of their body.

Bounce the Ball
Materials -  2 or 3 wiffle or Ping-Pong balls
          1 sheet

You will need at least four people for this game. Each person holds a corner and side of
the sheet – stretched taut. Place the balls in the center of the sheet. Participants shake the
sheet causing the balls to bounce in the air. The object of the game is to keep the balls
bouncing in the air and keep them from bouncing off the sheet onto the floor.

Tunnel Time
Materials -  None

This activity helps participants stretch out their backs. Participants bend over on all
fours (hands and feet) and lift their belly up to the ceiling – hold stomach in as far as
possible and round the back. Choose the smallest person in the group to be the
“crawler”. At the count of “three” the participants will get in position and remain there
until the crawler has a chance to go through the tunnel. When the crawler reaches the
end, the tunnel can collapse!
**Stretch and Twist**  
**Materials** - None  

Participants reach their left hand behind their back, placing it on their right back, hip. Place the other hand on top of their head and gently tilt to the right. They should feel a stretch down the neck and across the upper shoulder. Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat on the other side. This is a good activity if a group has been sitting for a long period of time.

**Hand Jive!**  
**Materials** - None  

Fingers and hands need exercise, too! Participants close fists tight, and then spread fingers out wide. This is done 10 times. Next, keep hands wide open and touch all fingers to the thumb. Keep fingers wide apart the whole time the touches are done. Wrists are next! Participants join their hands by interlocking their fingers and circling their wrists around in both directions.

**Follow the Leader**  
**Materials** - None  

Ask a participant to lead stretching activities. Help the youth be prepared by discussing all the parts of the body that need to be stretched out. Work from the middle of the body (torso) out to the limbs. For example, start at the waist, then do the hips, upper leg, lower leg, ankles, then shoulders, arms, and wrists. Make sure no body part is missed! Hold each stretch for 20 to 30 seconds. Youth should not bounce as they stretch!

**Stir the Soup**  
**Materials** - None  

Each participant will find a partner to do this stretching activity. Both partners sit on the floor, face to face, with their feet touching in a wide straddle. They reach out and grab each other’s wrists and move side to side and forward and back. Keep knees straight! Partners can try making circles – small ones and then larger ones as muscles loosen up.

**Lift Off!**  
**Materials** - None  

Each participant will find a partner for this exercise. Both partners stand back-to-back (make sure partners are almost the same height and weight) and hook elbows. One person bends forward (knees slightly bent) hoisting the other person off the ground. This activity should be done slowly to stretch out the back. Switch positions and repeat. Participants should be careful not to lift someone who is too heavy!
Appliance Antics  
Materials -  Index cards  
Marker  

Write down the names of household appliances and machinery (one per card): blender, dishwasher, dryer, washing machine, vacuum cleaner, lawn mower, hair dryer, electric can opener, coffee maker, electric saw, power drill, etc. Participants sit in a circle and the cards are placed facedown in the center of the group. One youth selects the top card. Using both body movements and vocal sounds the youth act out the movements of the machine. The others must guess the machine. The person who guesses correctly gets to choose the next card to act out. Coordination, imagination, and a lot of endurance is helpful to excel in this activity!

Paper Towel Pass  
Materials -  Paper towels  

Each participant will find a partner for this muscle toning activity. Each partner must lie flat on their backs, head-to-head with legs extended straight out. Put a pile of three or four paper towels at the feet of each child. The first child (the “giver”) picks up the paper towel using only his toes. The giver then lifts his feet overhead and passes the paper towel to the “receiver” who has also lifted his feet overhead. After the paper towel has successfully “changed feet,” both parties lower their legs. Now the “giver” becomes the receiver and they try again. This activity can be made more challenging by passing different objects. Stomach muscles will be stretched and tightened after participating in this exercise!

Dynamic Dodge Ball  
Materials -  Rubber ball  

Ask youth to stand in a large circle. One child is selected to be in the center. When the ball is thrown at this child by one of the others in the circle the child in the center dodges the ball to avoid being hit. If the child is hit, the thrower joins the child in the center. There are now two children to aim for! If there is a miss, the child who catches the ball becomes the “thrower.” The game continues until all the children are in the center of the circle.

Balloon Soccer  
Materials -  10-inch round balloon  

This activity can be played outdoors or indoors in a wide-open room. Youth stand in a circle shoulder to shoulder, holding hands. Youth kick the balloon around the circle passing to each player in the circle. After the balloon has been kicked around the circle, ask everyone to take a giant step back and kick the balloon around again (hands may need
to be dropped). Keep playing until you run out of space! Encourage youth to try kicking with the other leg in the opposite direction or pass the balloon by bouncing it off their head!

**Hula To the Oldies!**

**Materials -**
- 1 hula hoop per participant
- ‘50s music cassett or CD player

A hula-hoop can help youth work stomach muscles, or obliques! Making hip circles with a hula hoop by standing with the feet apart, holding the hoop at hip height, bringing it back to one side as a wind up, and letting it go and rotating the hips in a circle. Encourage youth to see how many circles they can do. Engage them in a friendly competition – who can hula hoop the longest, fastest, with multiple hoops? Music from the 50s can set the stage for a nostalgic event!

**Runners Stretch**

**Materials -** None

Youth stand facing a wall and place their toes so they touch the wall. Place hands on the wall, push-up position. Take a small step backward, keeping the heel on the ground. Do it again with the other foot behind. Check to see that the heel is still on the ground. The leg that is not being stretched may bend slightly at the knee. Keep going backward one small step at a time until the heel starts to leave the floor. How far did youth get from the wall? Stretch the heel down slowly and hold for 20 seconds. Next do the other leg. This is a good stretch for the lower calf muscle and the Achilles tendon.

**Steppin Out!**

**Materials -**
- Pen/pencil
- Paper

Youth can do this activity outside or in a large room or hallway. They will certainly give their legs a workout! How many giant steps does it take to get across a yard or room? How many “baby steps” does it take to get back? Repeat all the way up the yard or room. Can youth walk backward doing baby steps? Can they do this without falling or losing their balance? Each participant can make a list of the different steps. Next to each one they can write how many steps it took for each trip up and down the yard or room. Compare and discuss the results!
Pass the Hoop
Materials - Hula hoop

Participants join hands in a big circle and remain holding hands through the game. One person in the circle has the hula-hoop on her arm and passes the hoop to the person next to her who has to climb through it while still holding on to the first person’s hand. The hoop goes from the second person’s arm, over her head, then down to her other arm. Next, the person next to her has to try to do the same thing. The goal is to move the hoop all the way along the circle. Make the game more exciting by challenging the group to time how long it takes them to pass the hoop along the circle!

These Boots Were Made For Walkin!
Materials - Tennis shoes
          Water bottles

A good way to exercise, talk with friends and get fresh air is to take a walk! Begin with easy warm up activities – stretch muscles in the legs, arms, shoulders, back and neck. Participants should select a comfortable stride. Fast walkers can walk together and slower walkers can form a group as well. Arms should swing comfortably and freely and hands should stay relaxed. Chart a one- or two-mile course on safe, well-lit streets or areas.

Allow Me to Introduce Myself
Materials - None

This is a flexibility exercise! Youth place one hand behind their head and one down the middle of the back. Next reach up and try to touch both hands together. Try it the other way, switching the top arm to the other side. Is one side more flexible than the other? Why?

Round and Round
Materials - None

Youth start in a push-up position with arms straight. Separate feet slightly to help with balance. Shift weight onto one arm, freeing the other arm to be held straight up toward the ceiling. Twist the body so it is sideways. Next move in a circle, switching hands as needed. Then go in the other direction.
Power Jumping
Materials - 6 to 8 feet of large bubble wrap
Clothespins (one for each child)
Measuring tape
Marker

Ask youth how far they can jump. Lay out a long strip of bubble wrap (preferably the large bubble kind). Youth stand at the end with both feet together. They swing their arms back and jump forward as far as possible. Listen to the bubbles popping! Fasten a clothespin with each participant’s name to the side of the bubble wrap where the heels landed. Ask youth what they can do to improve their jump (i.e., bend knees more, push harder off the toes, etc.). Use the measuring tape to measure the distance.

To See Or Not To See
Materials - Bandana or handkerchief

In this small group activity one youth is blindfolded and spun around three times. The other participants run or walk around him. The youth tries to tag one of the other participants by listening to their footsteps or their sounds! When the youth catches a participant, that person becomes “it.”

Cup Hop
Materials - 100 small paper or Styrofoam cups

Youth arrange 25 cups all over the floor in a random pattern. When everyone is ready youth hop from one cup to the next trying not to crush them (however, most will be flattened!). Ask youth to hop in different ways. Set out more replacement cups and put them farther apart, use only the right foot, or hop from one to the other. Youth can also try hopping with both legs stiff or in a squatting position. When the cups are crushed the game is over!

Can You Outdo an Aachoo?
Materials - Running track
Stopwatch or wristwatch with second hand

A sneeze can travel as fast as 100 miles per hour! Determine how many laps need to be run to cover a one-mile distance – usually four laps equals one mile. Youth run the lap as fast as possible. If it took two and a half minutes to run a quarter-mile lap, multiply that time by four (2.5 x 4 = 10 minute mile). Sixty minutes of running would equal six miles per hour. Youth may need help calculating the math. Determine if youth can outrun a sneeze!
**National Backyard-Games Day**

Materials -  Balloons  
  Volleyball net and ball  
  Soccer ball  
  Frisbees  
  Softball and bat  
  Badminton racquets and birdies  
  Football  
  Horseshoes  

One day in May (date changes each year) when friends and family gather together to play games outside. Each person or family can bring an activity to share as small or large group games.
Youth Physical Fitness Facts

1. The average child gets less than 15 minutes of vigorous activity a day.
2. The average child gets approximately 43 minutes of moderate physical activity a day.
3. The average child spends 20% of waking time watching TV.
4. Obesity and superobesity are up 36% and 98%, respectively, in the past 20 years.
5. The average child consumes at least 20 ounces of soda a day.
6. The child of today is less fit and weighs more than the child of the 60’s.
7. Thirty-six percent of children get daily physical education; 36% get two or fewer days.
8. Nine out of ten parents think their children are fit, when only one out of three are.
9. At age 10, 45% of young people say they participate, or intend to participate, on a non-school athletic or sports team. Among 18-year-olds, the figure is 26%.
10. Thirty percent of youth (10-19 years) have negative or neutral attitudes towards physical activity.
11. In a typical physical education class, only 27% of actual physical education time is devoted to motor activity.
12. The average heart rates in a typical 30-minute physical education class range between 90 and 129 beats per minute.
13. The older years get, the less likely they are to work out.
14. Grade school students are 24% more active than high schoolers.
15. Asian and Hispanic girls are notably less active than girls of other backgrounds, including African-Americans, Whites and girls of mixed heritage.
16. Children exercise less as they get older, boys about 3% less each year; girls, 7.5%.
17. The two biggest reasons kids participate in sport and exercise are fun and socialization.
18. About 42% of middle school students consider themselves more fit than their peers. Sixteen percent rate themselves as not as well.
19. Thirty-six percent of middle school students say that they think kids who exercise do better in school, about one-third are not sure, and 28% disagree.
20. Fifty-four percent of students claim that their physical education class is very important to them.
21. About 50% of all students report that physical education class time should be increased in the middle school.
22. The most popular physical education offerings for grades 7-9:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) basketball</td>
<td>1) basketball</td>
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<td>2) exercise</td>
<td>2) exercise</td>
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<td>3) baseball</td>
<td>3) volleyball</td>
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<td>4) football</td>
<td>4) jogging</td>
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<td>5) jogging</td>
<td>5) baseball/softball</td>
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Physical Activity
Websites

Website Links

Website Links to Health and Fitness Related Resources maintained by The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/readyset/nonfed.htm

The President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports:
www.fitness.gov/

Healthfinder – Gateway to Reliable Consumer Health Information maintained by the National Health Information Center, US Department of Health and Human Services:
www.healthfinder.gov

Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services:
www.dhss.state.mo.us

National Organizations and Related Sites

American Heart Association: Physical Activity www.justmove.org

American Diabetes Association: (800/342-2383) www.diabetes.org

American Running and Fitness Association: www.Americanrunning.org

Creative Walking: www.creativewalking.com

National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) 800/213-7193 Ext. 410

P.E. Central: http://pe.central.vt.edu

Shape-Up America: www.shapeup.org

National Network for Health: www.nnh.org


Youth Fitness Resource Center: www.americanfitness.net
References

Center for Disease Control and Prevention


Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services

