

Health Tips

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with

Dr. D


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Health Tip: "Healthy Toys" Revisited



Play is one of the most important ways that children learn and the toys that they use when playing are the tools to learning. Some toys can be considered purely "educational" such as those that teach vocabulary or computer skills. But others teach more fundamental skills, such as social interaction, creativity, problem solving, and exercise behavior. Certain toys can even bring parents and children together creating a bonding opportunity. In this season of giving, we should pay careful attention to those toys that we are offering our children.

Most people are aware of the risks of certain toys, particularly those with small parts that can cause choking or those that pose a risk to eyesight from flying projectiles. A few of the toys that the consumer group W.A.T.C.H. (World Against Toys Causing Harm) named to the "10 Worst Toys" for 2009 include X-Men Origins Slashin' Action Wolverine, Spy Gear Viper-Blaster and the Wall-E Foam Rocket Launcher. Although these toys were "blacklisted" because of certain features (darts, claws, etc.) that posed a risk to eyesight, it could also be argued that they lack some of the other qualities of toys that are best for our children.

Let's look at some "healthy toys" that can assist in developing important social, physical, and cognitive skills.

Toys to encourage creativity: Toys that encourage creativity often involve hands-on activities like craft projects, painting, coloring, drawing, or clay modeling. Good old blocks, Lego's, Tinker toys, and play dough are great for young children to develop small motor coordination, as well as fostering creativity. "Pretend" activities, are also a favorite among children. Puppet theaters, toy castles, farm play sets, play stores, dollhouses, and toy kitchens are some examples of toys that encourage children to use their imagination.

Toys to encourage physical activity: Many



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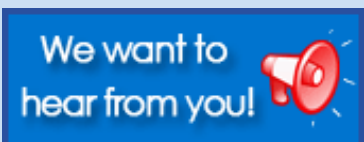
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popular toys these days pose a more insidious, and perhaps even more dangerous risk than those with small or flying parts. These are the ones that seem to discourage physical activity, such as motorized cars for children. It is well known that physical activity patterns (as well as eating habits) are to a large degree established in childhood. We have the opportunity to foster life-long physical activity in our children by the toys that we give and the activities that we encourage.

Remember roller skates, pogo sticks and bicycles? With the burgeoning problem of childhood obesity and type-2 diabetes, both closely tied to physical inactivity, we may be giving the gift of health by giving toys that encourage children to be active. Wagons, swings, slides, climbing equipment, and "push toys" are great for small children. Balls of various types (basketballs, footballs, baseballs, etc.) come with the expectation of physical activity. Badminton, volleyball and even croquet sets are great if you have a yard and available partners for your child. Don't forget too that you are a potential partner! There are also computer programs available that encourage exercise through vigorous dancing and movement which are great for times when outdoor play isn't practical.

Toys to encourage parent/child interaction:

Toys should never be used as a substitute for loving attention from parents and other caregivers. Many toys or materials, however, can enhance the interactions between parent and child. This type of interaction can foster social skills, language development, communication, social etiquette, and even moral values. Foremost on the list of "toys" to accomplish this are books read together. Older children will enjoy board games, puzzles, crafts, and various ball games.



Toys that encourage social interaction: Individual video devices, such as the Game Boy, can limit a child's opportunities for social interaction. Many toys work best and tend to be more fun when two or more children use them together. Certain types of toys such as wagons, games, and sports equipment, encourage peer interaction. Board games involving multiple players not only strengthen social skills such as taking turns, but also enhance color and letter recognition in younger children while increasing strategy and sequencing skills in older kids. Social play is promoted even more by dramatic play toys, such as dolls & doll houses, dress up clothes & action hero costumes, kitchen play equipment and puppets. These same toys also foster creativity. Other toys which encourage social interaction as well as offering other benefits include card games (from simple matching skills for young children to more complex math skills for older ones), jump rope (motor skills), jacks & pick-up sticks (fine motor skills), and puzzles (problem solving, spatial relationships).

While many of these toys may not top your child's wish list, they have a great chance of becoming some of their favorites. Perhaps more importantly, all of them will provide benefits that will last long after the holidays.

If you or someone in your family would like to know more about "Healthy Toys" for the holidays then click on the 'Ask eDoc' icon, to the right, login, and send us your questions.

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