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## **Classroom Exercise Breaks for Elementary Students**

### **Boost Grades, Improve Behavior**

Teachers can help improve test scores and student behavior by incorporating physical activity breaks into their daily classroom routines.

Research has shown that students who do brief bursts of exercise before taking tests score higher. In addition, regular activity breaks during the school day can help sharpen students' abilities to focus and stay on task.

Before trying these exercises in your classroom, make sure none of your students have health conditions that require restrictions on physical activity. Make sure each student has plenty of space, and won't bump into classmates or anything else in your room.

Also check to see if all your students are wearing appropriate shoes, such as sneakers. If students touch the floor during any exercises, make sure they wash their hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer when they're done their exercise break.

When taking a break, encourage activities that get the body moving and the heart pumping, such as dancing, jumping, and running in place. You also can try some of these easy-to-do exercises that work on flexibility, strength, and cardio. Each of these fun exercises for K-5 students takes 2-3 minutes, and kids can do them right at their desks. No equipment is needed.

Start with a brief warm-up (like jumping jacks or jogging in place) before performing these exercises.

### **Light Exercises**

Kids doing light physical exercises breathe normally as they do basic gross motor activities at a controlled pace.

#### **Sky reaches**

Do this three times:

1. Stand up.
2. Swing arms up to the sky.
3. Rise up on your tippy toes.
4. Reach for the sky while keeping your body tight.
5. Hold for 15 seconds.
6. Lower your heels and arms.

#### **Shoulder blasts**

Do this 10 times:

1. Hold your arms straight out to the sides.
2. Make arm circles forward (start with small circles, then gradually larger circles).
3. Reverse direction and make arm circles backward (large circles, then gradually smaller circles).
4. Raise your arms in front of your body and move your arms up and down.
5. Raise your arm above your head and wave them side to side, like a windshield wiper.

6. Pump your arms above head to "raise the roof."

### **Squats**

Do this 10 times slowly:

1. Stand with your legs a little wider than shoulder-width apart.
2. Hold your arms out in front of your body.
3. Slowly bend your knees and squat down until your thighs are parallel to the floor.
4. Rise up slowly.

### **Hand walks**

Do this five times:

1. Bend forward at your waist.
2. Reach down and touch hands to floor.
3. Walk your hands out for a count of 8.
4. Walk your hands to left for a count of 4.
5. Walk your hands back to the center for a count of 4.
6. Walk your hands right for a count of 4.
7. Walk your hands back to the center for a count of 4.
8. Walk your hands back for a count of 8.

### **Star jumps**

Do this 10 times:

1. Squat until your thighs are parallel to the floor (see **squats**).
2. From this position, jump up reaching your hands and feet out like a star.
3. Land softly on your feet, dropping back to the squat position.

### **Mountain climbers**

Do 20 foot switches:

1. On the floor, go to a plank position by putting your:
  - o Hands flat on the floor
  - o Hands shoulder-width apart
  - o Arms straight
  - o Back flat
2. Mimic a running motion by switching one foot at a time.

Students can add intensity by adding speed.

### **Moderate Exercises**

Kids doing moderate physical exercises breathe harder than normal, move fairly quickly, and find it a little difficult to talk during the activities.

### **Sun salutation**

Do this dynamic yoga stretch five times:

1. Start with your feet together, hands at your side, and your head in a neutral position.
2. Raise your arms out to the side and overhead.
3. Bend forward at your waist and put your hands on the floor.

4. Step or jump your feet back to the plank position (see **mountain climbers**).
5. Do half of a push-up (can drop to the knees).
6. Drop your hips toward the floor, lift head and chest into an "up-dog," and hold for 5 seconds.
7. Lift your hips and drop your head and shoulders to a "down-dog," and hold for 5 seconds.
8. Step or jump your feet back toward your hands in a forward bend.
9. Rise slowly to a standing position.

Moving through positions more quickly will increase the cardio workout.

To enhance stretching and strength, kids can hold forward bends and the up- and down-dogs for longer than 5 seconds.

### **Robots**

Do this fast exercise 20 times:

1. Stand up tall.
2. Hop forward, then immediately backward.
3. At the same time, raise one arm up and one arm down.
4. Keep hopping your feet front and back while alternating arms up and down simultaneously.

### **Hand pushes**

Do this isometric exercise, five times, with a 20-second break between each:

1. Put your hands in front of your face, with your palms touching.
2. Push your palms and fingers against themselves.
3. Keep pushing your hands together for 10-15 seconds.

Students can push their hands together as hard as they are comfortable as long as it doesn't hurt. Make sure students breathe during this exercise, because many kids tend to hold their breath while pushing. Challenge students to stand on one leg while pushing, then repeat standing on other leg.

### **Frog jumps**

Do this dynamic exercise 12 times:

1. Start in the squat position (see **squats**), feet a little wider than shoulder-width apart.
2. Put your hands between your legs, like a frog.
3. Jump upward, and softly land back to the frog position.

Students may want to try this variation: While jumping up, click your heels together.

### **Vigorous Exercises**

Kids doing vigorous physical exercises breathe much harder than normal, move quite fast, and find talking to be difficult and labored during the activities.

### **Jump lunges**

Do this 12 times slowly, making sure to stay balanced:

1. Stand tall with your feet together.
2. Place your hands on your hips or hold your arms out straight for balance.
3. Move into a lunge position by stepping one foot forward and bending your knee (don't extend your knee past your toes).

4. Hop and switch your feet so that your back foot comes forward to a bent-knee position, while the other foot goes back.

With this exercise, form is more important than speed.

### **Desk push-ups**

Do this 12 times:

1. Put your hands firmly on the edge of your desk.
2. Step your feet back so you're leaning into your desk.
3. Bend your elbows and slowly lower your body toward your desk, keeping your back straight.
4. Push yourself away from your desk.

Make sure desks are stable and feet don't slip on floor. To increase difficulty, students can move their feet back farther from their desks or move their hands closer together on their desks.

### **T push-ups**

Do this 10 times slowly:

1. On the floor, start in the plank position (see **mountain climbers**).
2. Lift one arm up and turn your body sideways so that your body looks like the letter T.
3. Hold the T for 5 seconds.
4. Return to the plank position, then repeat with your other side.

### **Burpees**

Do this 10 times:

1. Stand tall with your hands at your side.
2. Squat down to the floor (see **squats**).
3. Put your hands on the floor.
4. Jump to the plank position (see **mountain climbers**).
5. Jump your feet back to the squat position.
6. Star jump back up (see **star jumps**).

Reviewed by: Mary L. Gavin, MD

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