



Your pre-schooler with Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis

>>> Information for parents of a child newly diagnosed with JIA

Children who develop Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (JIA) at a very early age seem to tolerate their condition quite well. Perhaps they do not remember a time when they were well, and so living with arthritis feels 'normal' for them. However, young children with JIA may show less enthusiasm to explore and play. Playing is an essential activity for physical, emotional and social development. Parents of children with JIA need to adapt activities or create new games so that children can play together, and parents and children can enjoy shared time. This information sheet gives you some ideas.

Playing and exploring are important because they..

- Help children learn about the world, practice using their hands, and recognise things. This is especially significant if your child is too ill to enjoy going out to the park or other activities which would expose them to new things
- Distract your child from feelings of illness, pain or fatigue
- Help your child have fun, share laughter and learn
- Restore some balance between serious medical treatment and fun
- Build your relationship with your child

Ideas for playing and learning

You can do many things to help your pre-schooler learn and enjoy playing, even if unwell or in pain. Include other children wherever possible so that children learn to play with each other. Here are a few ideas:

In warm water

- Being in warm water soothes painful joints so give your child as many play times in the bath as they enjoy. When they are more comfortable physically, children naturally begin to enjoy exploring, testing and playing with things.
- Use a long non-slip mat in the bath for added safety. You can also get sitting support seats to use in the bath. Do not leave your child unattended.
- Use plastic household objects for bath time play, like sieves, ladles and bowls.
- Seek out special bath time toys. Give one at a time to the child to play with, and when your child begins to get bored, change toys.
- Play nursery rhyme tapes and do the actions with your child. It is amazing how differently they join in when they don't hurt.
- Buy rubberised foam letters and soap crayons to use on the bath or tiles.
- Find an activity you can do in the bathroom at the same time (like the ironing!)
- Take water play outdoors in summer (although keep them in out of direct sun).

Tips for other activities

- Take your child swimming – it is good for their health, and an opportunity for the whole family to play together.
- Even if a loved activity is painful for your child, let them do it for short periods.
- During any activity, take regular breaks for moving and stretching.
- Finger or glove puppets exercise children's hands without them noticing.

Acknowledgements:

Choices for Families of Children with Arthritis (2003).



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