The National Association for Sports and Physical Education states that “the unique role of quality physical education programs is to develop the health-related fitness, physical competence, and cognitive understanding about physical activity for all students so that they can adopt healthy and physically active lifestyles” (NASPE, 2005c). Competent, certified physical education teachers provide instruction so that students learn to maintain and/or improve their physical well-being, understand the importance of being physically active, and develop as socially-responsible citizens. They plan, manage their classes, and teach so that their students receive as much active learning time (ALT-PE; Seidentop & Tannehill, 2000) as possible. However, due to cuts in school budgets and other circumstances, qualified PE teachers are confronted with facilities and equipment that are marginal and 40+ students in their classes. Regardless of the teaching environment, teachers must find ways to modify instruction to provide ample inclusive and developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning and practice (Graham, Holt/Hale, & Parker, 2004).

This article describes developmentally appropriate activities that can be used in large physical education classes (40+) to teach students about physical fitness concepts. Students should learn the hows and whys of being physically fit, including health- and skill-related fitness knowledge and the Principles of Training. Some activities in this article were drawn from the Physical Best Elementary and Physical Best Secondary Activity Guide (NASPE, 2005a, 2005b). All the activities keep students active, are developmental, and provide students with knowledge about their health and wellness.

The ultimate goal of an effective physical education teacher is to develop students who are physically educated (AAHPERD, 1992). Toward that end, students should be taught how exercise affects the body so they understand why it’s important to be fit throughout their lives. They should also learn to participate in and value a wide variety of physical activities.

**Warm-Up and Cool-Down**

Define the purpose of a warm-up and cool-down.

**Mirror and Match Stretch**

Focus: Define warm-up and the two phases for a warm-up.

Level: 5.6 Elementary PB Book, Primary

Equipment: Music, CD player

Activity description: Students move around the room using various locomotor patterns to warm up their bodies. On a signal from the teacher, students stop and get back-to-back with someone near them. As they turn to face each other, they take turns mirroring and matching several stretch, bend, and twist movements to loosen and relax their muscles. Mirroring movements are reproduced as if looking into a mirror. Typically, what the leader does with the right side of the body, the mirror does on the left. For matching, movements the leader does with the right side of the body, the matcher also does with the right. Otherwise, all the movements are duplicated exactly.

To define the purpose of a warm-up, ask students what happens to the body during a warm-up, i.e., the body sweats, heart beats faster.

**Four Corner Heart Healthy Warm-up**

Focus: Warm-up

Level: 3.5 Secondary PB book, Intermediate

Equipment: List of exercises, music, CD player

Activity description: Explain that there are two phases to a warm-up. One is to warm the body up and the other is to loosen and relax the muscles. Arrange students in squads. Choose four exercise leaders who stand in front, at both sides, and at the back of the room. Exercise leader #1 performs an aerobic warm-up task. All the squads follow suit. At the completion of the task the squads jog in place, making a ¼ turn to the right
to face exercise leader #2. The new leader performs a
different aerobic task. The squads follow each exercise
leader as they turn clockwise around the room. On the
second time around, the exercise leaders perform tasks
that loosen, stretch, and relax muscles.

Discuss with the class what a warm-up does for the
body during the two phases of a warm-up.

**PACER “Football” Frenzy**

**Focus:** Warm-up and practice for PACER assessment

**Level:** Primary

**Equipment:** Objects to pass easily, i.e., small footballs, bean bags, etc.

**Activity description:** Everyone begins with a small object in their hand (football, beanbags, tennis balls, critters) and is spread out in the playing area. Start the PACER CD. Students jog throughout the general space. On each beep, they pass their object to another player. Randomly stop the CD and call out “touchdown.” On that command, students stand back-to-back with someone near them. Direct them to then perform one of the following stretch-and-bends: (a) Back-to-back, pass the objects side to side; (b) Back-to-back, pass the objects overhead and between legs; (c) Sit feet-to-feet, and perform the back-saver sit-and-reach to exchange objects.

**PACER Shuttle**

**Focus:** Warm-up and practice for PACER assessment

**Level:** Intermediate

**Equipment:** Objects that pass easily, i.e., batons, bean bags, etc.

**Activity description:** Practice the PACER test as a squad relay, handing-off a baton, beanbag, or similar object. Using the shuttle formation, one squad member at a time leaves the starting line, either on the teacher’s whistle or the beep on the FITNESSGRAM recording. Take turns traveling across the floor to hand-off the object to the next squad member. If a squad member tires or becomes winded, someone else in line may go, allowing the fatigued teammate to rest. Count the number of laps each squad completes. Encourage all squads to try to improve their total the next time they practice the PACER test.

**Variation:** Sport-skill PACER—Instead of just running, use other sport skills such as dribbling a basketball, soccer ball, or hockey puck, passing off to a squad member at or near the beep.

Check heart rate to see if particular sport skills cause higher heart rates than others. Discuss what happened to the body during the warm-up and whether the practice is improving how they do the PACER.

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**Health-Related vs. Skill-Related Fitness Components**

**Paper Plate Fitness**

**Focus:** Define health-related vs. skill-related fitness components.

**Level:** Primary

**Equipment:** Depends on tasks selected for each station;

**activity cards**

**Activity description:** Set up a variety of health- and skill-related physical fitness stations. Place paper plates (each with the name of a station activity written on it) face down in the middle of the playing area. Students flip over a plate, read the name of an activity, and go to that station. The station card includes activity instructions and informs students of the station’s health-benefits.

Possible stations include tic-tac-toe push-ups, partner high-five curl-ups, flexibility cards, jump rope math problems, hurdle jumps, juggling, cup stacking, dribble/shoot b-ball or soccer, striking a balloon/beach ball, vertical jumps, hula-hop moves. At the end of class, discuss the health-benefits of staying active.

**On Your “Spot, Get Set, Go”**

**Focus:** Define heart rate check and aerobic exercise.

**Level:** 3.6 Elementary PB Book, Primary

**Equipment:** CD player and music

**Activity description:** Have students perform a heart

rate check by feeling their heart with one hand and
opening and closing the fist of the other hand in time
with the heart’s beat. Have them then begin to perform
locomotor patterns (walk, slide, gallop, skip, jog, and
jump). After each locomotor pattern, do the heart rate
check to see how fast it’s beating now.

Discuss what aerobic exercise is and how different
locomotor patterns changed their heart rate.

**Fitness Monopoly**

**Focus:** Define physical fitness, health, and skill-related activities.

**Level:** Primary and Intermediate

**Equipment:** Depends on tasks selected for 8-16 different types of health-related and skill-related fitness stations, cones, 1 large dice, poly spots

**Activity description:** Define the five health-related and
six skill-related categories of fitness activities. Set up stations with activities appropriate to both types of
physical fitness, health- and skill-related. Use poly spots
to create a Monopoly-like board grid in the center of
the room. Students move around the “board” according
to dice rolls. On the bottom of each poly spot, indicate
the number or name of a station students are to go to
when they land on that spot. At the end of the game,
review which stations were health-related and which
stations were skill-related.
Health Benefits

Benefit Pick-up

Focus: Define the health-benefits of being physically fit.
Level: 3.4 Elementary PB Books
Equipment: Benefit sticks/cards, hoops, CD player, music, cones
Activity description: Write several health benefits related to physical activity and exercise on 3 x 5 index cards or popsicle sticks. Small squads start at a cone station that holds the benefit cards/sticks. The squads jog around the perimeter, collecting a benefit card each time they pass the start position. At the end of the task, bring the students together to discuss how many health benefits they collected while engaging in the physical activity. Draw a parallel to how non-activity fails to produce those health benefits.

Dribble on Down the Road

Focus: Health-Benefits of Physical Activity
Level: Intermediate
Equipment: 3’ sections of rope for one third of the class, health-benefit cards/sticks, dribbling balls, buckets
Activity description: One third of the class are cooperative defenders. The remaining two-thirds are dribblers. The cooperative defenders stand next to each other holding the rope sections. They may only move from side to side together. Their job is to block the dribblers from getting through to the other side. The dribblers attempt to dribble past the defenders to the other side of the playing area. If they get there, they get to pick up a health-benefit card. After picking up a card, they walk around the perimeter of the playing area and put the card into one of several Physical Activity Buckets. The dribblers try and see how many different health-benefit cards they can pick-up, dribbling through the defenders as many times as possible before the signal to switch roles. Switch players so everyone has a chance to dribble and defend.
Variations: Try the game with different skills (dribble a basketball, dribble a soccer ball, running with a football, using a hockey stick and puck, etc.). Keep track of the number of health-benefits picked up. Discuss how the benefits they picked up may be desirable in the future, not just as a function of the physical activity in this game.

Frequency

Off the Couch

Focus: How long and how often do students have to participate in physical activity to be aerobically fit?
Level: 6.3 Elementary PB Book, Primary
Equipment: For each group, 12 markers, paper plate made into a clock, hula hoop, music, and a CD player.
Activity description: Arrange hula hoops around the outside of the playing area, each with a paper plate clock and 12 markers in it. Assign a small group of students to each hula hoop. On a signal, the students move in and around the playing area performing locomotor patterns, shooting hoops, dribbling basketballs, or other types of physical activity common to the class. They periodically return to their hula hoop to record the amount of time they have been participating in physical activity. One minute of class physical activity equals five minutes on their clock. In essence, students engage in several rounds of physical activity, marking the clock after each round.

This task activity is purposely repetitive to demonstrate how physical activity time is accumulated throughout the day. NASPE (2004) recommends that children accumulate at least 60 minutes of physical activity a day most days of the week.

Intensity

Continuous Relay

Focus: Intensity and target heart rate
Level: 3.10 Secondary PB Book, Intermediate
Equipment: none
Activity description: Create several groups of three or more students. Number each group member (1, 2, or 3). Arrange #1 (jogger) and #3 (lateral jumps) on one side of the playing area and #2 (jump rope) on the other side. #1 jogs across to #2 and takes his/her place. #2, who was pretending to jump rope, jogs over to #3, who has been performing lateral jumps. The relay continues until the teacher stops it. Students take their heart rate after each round to make sure they are in a safe target heart rate zone. Perform the relay for three rounds. Advise students to keep their heart rate in the target heart rate zone. During closure, define the purpose of working out in a target heart rate.
Variation: Change the fitness tasks. For example, instead of jogging, dribble a basketball or soccer ball.
Jump Frenzy

**Focus:** Intensity  
**Level:** Intermediate  
**Equipment:** Jump station cards, cones, music (Van Halen-jump), CD player  
**Activity description:** Create a series of Jump stations. They might be fun ways to jump rope, or simple plyometric stations that involve several kinds of jumps and take-offs. Examples: jump back and forth, vertical jumps, scissor jumps, standing long jump, jump side-to-side. Begin with fifteen-second activity periods, with 5-second intervals for rest. To demonstrate the effects of increased intensity during a workout, change the ratio of activity to rest (e.g., increase the activity time and decrease the rest time), or change the task (e.g., increase the degree of difficulty of the jumps). Perform heart rate checks to make sure that students stay in their target heart rate zone as they perform the stations.

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Reps and Sets Workout

**Focus:** Define repetitions and sets to develop a muscular strength and endurance workout.  
**Level:** Primary and Intermediate  
**Equipment:** spri bands, dyna bands  
**Activity description:** Students perform a series of teacher-directed curl-ups, push-ups, or any other exercises using spri or dyna bands to learn the definition of reps and sets and to practice the form correctly. A rep is one repetition of an exercise. One set is a number of repetitions of the same exercise. A number of sets are a workout! Discuss the link of reps and sets to endurance, in terms of how much time it takes to perform exercises correctly.

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Spell With Speed

**Focus:** Spell and perform exercises that work specific muscle groups.  
**Level:** Primary and Intermediate  
**Equipment:** Several hundred alphabet tiles (staples) or wooden alphabet blocks, Spell with Speed cards  
**Activity description:** Arrange students in groups of 2-3 around the perimeter of the playing area with a Spell with Speed card. Place alphabet tiles or wooden alphabet blocks face down in the middle of the floor. Each group must use the tiles to spell the name of the muscle on their card. One player at a time walks, skips, gallops, or uses a scooter to travel to the center and pick up a letter. They bring it back to see if it is one of the letters on their Spell with Speed card. If it isn’t, the next player takes it back and gets another letter. The first group to (a) complete their card, (b) explain to the class where that muscle is on the body, and (c) demonstrate an exercise that works this particular muscle or muscle group wins the round.  
**Variation:** Play the game with other vocabulary words, names of bones, types of exercise, etc.

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Move Up the Line

**Focus:** To participate in specific types of activities that relate to different health- and skill-related fitness components.  
**Level:** Primary and Intermediate  
**Equipment:** balls, aerobic steps, jump ropes  
**Activity description:** Discuss the purpose of training and what types of activities/exercises train the body. Arrange students in squads of four or more. Each squad lines up to perform a specific training activity, in particular, cardio-respiratory, muscular strength, and endurance activities. Everyone in the squad performs the exercises together. For example, the 1st squad jumps rope, the 2nd squad performs push-ups, the 3rd squad does jumping Jacks/Jill’s, the 4th squad does curl-ups, the 5th squad does grapevine/carioca step, the 6th squad does lunges or squats, the 7th squad dribbles a basketball in place, the 8th squad jogs in place and calls out motivation to the other squads. Each activity is done for one minute. Then the squads all move up one place and the squad in first position goes to the back.

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Muscle Trek

**Focus:** Know the names of specific muscles and an activity that strengthens that muscle.  
**Level:** 4.10 Elementary PB Book, Primary  
**Equipment:** Depends on tasks selected for 6-8 different tasks. Muscle trek signs – muscle names, hula hoops  
**Activity description:** Select 6-8 tasks that work specific muscle groups, such as lunges for the quadriceps, triceps, extension for triceps, etc. Spread students out in
Progression and Overload

Progression refers to training that is sequentially adjusted to the energy level of the performer. Overload refers to increases in the level of practice that cause one’s level of fitness to improve.

PACER Practice

Focus: Practice the PACER Test in order to improve cardio-respiratory endurance.
Level: Primary and Intermediate
Equipment: PACER CD, CD player
Activity description: Practice the PACER test within the boundaries of the playing area. Remind students that in order to improve their cardio-vascular endurance, they need to maintain a PACE within their target heart rate zone. If they get too tired to reach the boundary line, allow them to turn on the beat (wherever they are) so they can keep going with the group. Challenge them to complete as many laps as possible, attempting to remain in their target heart zone for the full 20 minutes.

Twelve Ways of Fitness

Focus: Progression and Overload
Level: 7.9 Secondary PB Book, Intermediate
Equipment: 12 Ways of Fitness cards
Activity description: With students in squads, choose twelve exercise leaders. They will lead specific exercise tasks each time their number comes up. The tasks should be progressive. The activity is based on the holiday favorite Twelve Days of Christmas. #1 leads the first task for everyone. Then #2 does the second task with everyone, followed by a return to #1’s task. Next, #3 does the third task, followed by #2 and #1. This process continues until all twelve tasks have been completed. Sample tasks are push-ups, curls, crab kicks, golden rests, leaping lunges, jumping jacks, carioca steps, skips in place, etc. Discuss how the activity keeps students in their target heart rate zone the entire time.
Variation: On different days, allow the exercise leaders to determine the progression of tasks, reminding them of the need to keep everyone in their target heart rate zone. Discuss how repetition progressively overloads the muscles to make them stronger.

Cooperative Cardio Kickball

Focus: Define overload and progression for aerobic endurance.
Level: Intermediate
Equipment: Four bases, four buckets or hoops, 8-12 kicking objects (nerf soccer balls/tennis balls)
Activity description: Divide the class into two teams. Place the balls next to the pitcher, or give each player a ball to kick when it’s their turn. Keep both the kicking team and the fielding team in the target heart rate zone by requiring that they keep moving at all times, both offensively or defensively. To do this, the kicking team lines up and kicks one ball at a time, but one right after the other, and runs the bases. This continues until everyone has kicked. The last kicker yells “last kicker” before he/she kicks. Meanwhile, the fielders retrieve the kicked balls and run to place them in buckets or hoops near each base. When all the balls are in the buckets/hoops, the pitcher yells “Freeze.” All running stops immediately. A run is scored for every player that comes home before the “Freeze.” The kicking and fielding team switch places after each inning. Check heart rate after each inning to see if students are in their target heart rate zone.

Cardio Flag Tag

Focus: Define intensity and progression.
Level: Intermediate
Equipment: Rip flags, scarves, or holy moly strips (www.holymolystrap.com), CD player and music
Activity description: Attach or wear flags as appropriate. On “go” students spread out and try to steal as many flags from one another as possible. Only one flag can be stolen at a time. Each time a flag is stolen, students raise the flag over their head and move to a safe zone to put it on their own belt. No one is eliminated when flags are stolen; they can continue to steal other flags. Play several rounds. Make each round a bit longer than the previous round. Check heart rate to make sure students stay within their target heart rate zone. Make sure students understand their target heart rate by discussing how staying within the range allowed them to continue playing as the rounds got longer.
Nutrition and Body Composition Concepts

Maintaining Balance

**Focus:** Define body composition.

**Level:** 6.1 Elementary PB Book, Primary

**Equipment:** many cones, domes, or large plastic cups

**Activity description:** Scatter cones, half upright and half tipped over in the activity area. Discuss the benefits of healthy body composition (body fat vs. lean body mass). Divide the class into two groups—Up-body fat and Down-lean muscle tissue. Each team lines up outside the playing area. On “go” the Ups begin to set the tipped cones upright and the Downs tip the upright cones over. As students tire, stop the activity and count the cones. The ratio for maintaining balanced body composition is \( \frac{1}{3} \)rd body fat (up) to \( \frac{2}{3} \)rd lean mass (down). Discuss the ratio required for healthy body composition. Switch player roles (Ups and Downs) and consider other strategies for maintaining a desirable ratio. Then apply the strategies to real life.

**Cholesterol Clogger**

**Focus:** Define metabolism and cholesterol.

**Level:** Primary and Intermediate

**Equipment:** Hoops and 50+ bean bags

**Activity description:** This is a tag game in which runners pick up food (bean bags) on the far side of the gym and try to bring it back to make their body (represented by the hoops) healthy. Choose one or more students to be cholesterol cloggers and a few others to be the healthy heart. Anyone tagged becomes frozen cholesterol. The healthy heart un-tags the frozen cholesterol, who, after some processing—a teacher directed exercise—return to helping deliver nutrients to the body. Discuss the dangers of cholesterol, in particular, how it contrasts with muscular strength and muscular endurance in terms of maintaining a healthy metabolism.

**Calorie Blaster**

**Focus:** Define what a calorie is and how activity consumes calories.

**Level:** Primary and Intermediate

**Equipment:** Pins and beanbags

**Activity description:** Provide each student with a bean bag and a bowling pin, which represent calories taken into the body. Spread students out in the gym with their pin and beanbag. Have them place the bowling pin safely at their feet. The object of the activity is to knock down other pins by SLIDING the beanbag on the floor and striking pins down, while at the same time protecting their own pin. When bowling pins are knocked down, either accidentally or on purpose, students are to pick up their pin (calorie) and beanbag and jog the perimeter of the gym one time to get back into the game.

**Discussion:** Throughout the activity, students need to leave their pin unprotected to retrieve loose beanbags. Remind students that many foods offer empty calories and that those empty calories can create an imbalance if there is not enough exercise to use them up. Therefore, allowing empty calories into the body, and accompanying this with insufficient exercise, upsets the body’s healthy balance.

Summary

Preparation for fitness concepts must be integrated across the physical education curriculum in order to enable students to learn fitness concepts, maintain healthy fitness levels, and manifest positive attitudes toward fitness. Physical education teachers have the opportunity to use activities during their daily lesson plans that prepare students to learn about fitness levels and the maintenance of a healthy lifestyle. Such activities are successful only if they are enjoyable and presented in a developmentally appropriate fashion.

References


For More Information

It is important that health and physical education teachers know where to investigate professional development and resources that increase their knowledge of health-related fitness and improve their teaching. Physical Best and FITNESSGRAM workshops are organized through NASPE/AAHPERD. For more information regarding the FITNESSGRAM and the Physical Best program, contact Physical Best at (800) 213-7193 or by e-mail at physicalbest@AAHPERD.org. For materials for the FITNESSGRAM and the Physical Best program, contact Human Kinetics at (800) 747-4457 or by e-mail at humank@hkusa.com.