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**FEATURE**

# Have fun outdoors with hooping

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**H**ula Hoops® sold like crazy at the height of the fad in the 1950s. Although they never really went away, hoops have begun reappearing more often recently in children’s games and adult fitness classes. The activity, now commonly called “hooping” or “hoop dance,” has genuine merit as physical exercise.

“Hooping compares pretty favorably with most other group classes, in terms of heart rate and

calorie burn,” said John Porcari, a University of Wisconsin researcher who conducted a study of a small group of women for the American Council on Exercise (Holthusen et al. 2011). Hooping burns approximately 210 calories in a 30-minute session, making it an effective way to lose weight when combined with a limited-calorie diet. Hooping also contributes to cardiovascular health.

Playing with hoops offers many

benefits for children. It helps them develop gross motor skills, balance, body awareness, muscular coordination, and rhythm. Apart from its physical benefits, hooping is great fun for children—and their teachers.

The activities below offer games for the outdoors. Three-year-olds will enjoy the simpler games, but children need to be 4 or 5 before they can spin a hoop around the waist for more than a minute or two. You’ll need at least six hoops for children.

## About the hoops

Hoops are basically rings of plastic tubing, often in bright colors or patterns. They are available from school supply houses at \$5 to \$6 apiece. Lakeshore Learning, for example, sells hoops in sets of three for \$16.99 for 24-inch hoops and \$19.99 for 30-inch hoops.

By contrast, adult hoop used in fitness activities are 37 to 45 inches in diameter and cost \$17 or more apiece. They typically are weighted, varying from 1 to 4 pounds apiece. Heavier hoops rotate around the body more slowly, which makes hooping a bit easier while potentially burning more calories and gaining more fitness benefits (Livestrong.com).

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## Learn to hoop

Give each child a hoop, and space children at a safe distance apart to avoid running into each other.

Encourage children to move the hoop in some way, such as:

- laying it flat on the ground and jumping from outside to inside and back, over and over
- rolling it upright along the ground
- tossing it in the air
- spinning it around the waist

To help children learn how to spin the hoop around the waist, have them first rotate the hips right and left without the hoop.

## Tunnel through hoops

Have children stand in a line, each with a hoop upright and touching the ground to form a tunnel. Invite other children to crawl or run through the tunnel.

Take turns to ensure everyone a chance at moving through the hoops.

## Ride in a hoop

Invite two children to get inside a hoop, one in front of the other. One child whose chest presses against the hoop is the driver, and the other child whose back presses against the hoop is the passenger.

Encourage the children to take turns, driving each other around the playground. Children can pretend to be driving a car, truck, boat, or stagecoach.

## Dance a hokey-pokey hoop

Invite children to each hold a hoop upright and sing the Hokey Pokey song. As they sing, they place the appropriate body part (right arm, left arm, right leg, left

leg, head, whole body) inside the hoop.

**Variations:** Younger children may lay the hoops on the ground while singing the Hokey Pokey song. Attach streamers to the hoops and invite children to move the hoops and dance to music.

## Shoot into the hoop

Use a rope to hang a hoop on a tree limb or roof overhang. Invite children to toss a lightweight ball through the hoop.

## Toss the hoop

Place a plastic milk jug filled with sand on the ground. Invite children to take turns tossing a hoop at the milk jug target. Start close to the target, and gradually increase the tossing distance.

## Do the hoop relay

Have children form two lines, six or eight children in a line. At a signal, give a hoop to the first children in line. They pull the hoop over their heads and down the body to the ground and then go back up again, handing off to the second child in line. This action continues to the last child. The group that finishes first wins the relay.

## Jump the hoops

Lay six or more hoops flat on the ground in a circle, with edges touching. Invite each child to stand in a different hoop. At a given signal, the children jump into the next hoop going clockwise. At another signal, they reverse direction.

**Variation:** Children may pretend they are frogs, jumping from one lily pad to another.

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## Re-use a hoop

Got an old, cracked hoop that has seen better days? Instead of throwing it in the trash and adding to the landfill, tie fabric or paper streamers to it for dramatic play outdoors. Make a wire or string hanger and hang it to a tree or roof overhang. Children may pretend it's a rain shower, waterfall, chandelier, spacecraft, giant octopus, or forest.

## Do a hoop marathon

As children gain proficiency in spinning a hoop around the waist, set up a marathon activity to see who can hoop the longest.

## Skip the hoop

Instead of a jump rope, use a large hoop to skip around the playground. Encourage children to recite nursery rhymes or skip chants as they jump. For more chants, see [www.todayparent.com/skippingsongs](http://www.todayparent.com/skippingsongs) and [www.gameskidsplay.net/jump\\_rope\\_rhymes/](http://www.gameskidsplay.net/jump_rope_rhymes/).

## Learn more about hoops

Encourage school-age children to learn more about hoops via the Internet, library reference books, and interviews with parents and grandparents. Here are two resources to get them started:

- Townsend, Allie. Feb. 16, 2011. All-TIME 100 Greatest Toys: 1950s, Hula Hoop. Time.com, [www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2049243\\_2048654\\_2049245,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2049243_2048654_2049245,00.html). This article acknowledges the successful patent marketing of the Hula Hoop® in the 1950s but states that hooping has actually been around for centuries.
- [www.worldhoopday.org](http://www.worldhoopday.org). This

website describes a nonprofit organization whose mission is to "bring joy through the importance of play to children around the world." The group has set Oct. 5, 2013, as World Hoop Day this year, encouraging communities to create a more peaceful world through play and giving back.

## References

- Holthusen, Jordan; John Porcari; Carl Foster; and Scott Doberstein, with Mark Anders. January 2011. "ACE-sponsored Research: Hooping—Effective Workout or Child's Play?" American Council on Exercise, [www.acefitness.org/certified-newsarticle/1094/](http://www.acefitness.org/certified-newsarticle/1094/).
- Ipatenco, Sara. July 28, 2010. "How to Teach Children to Use a Hula Hoop," Livestrong

Foundation, [www.livestrong.com/article/187009-how-to-teach-children-to-use-a-hula-hoop/](http://www.livestrong.com/article/187009-how-to-teach-children-to-use-a-hula-hoop/).

- Laskowski, Edward. July 9, 2011. "Do weighted hula hoops provide a good workout, or are they just a gimmick?" Mayo Clinic, [www.mayoclinic.com/health/weighted-hula-hoops/AN01638](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/weighted-hula-hoops/AN01638).
- Livestrong.com. n.d. "Hula Hoop Exercises," [www.livestrong.com/hula-hoop-exercises/](http://www.livestrong.com/hula-hoop-exercises/). ■



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