Today’s piece was prepared by Michael Lin, MD, based on an NPR story [5 proven benefits of play](https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/08/31/642567651/5-proven-benefits-of-play)

This article reviews a recently published clinical report in *Pediatrics* looking at the *Power of Play* and presents a summary that highlights the “5 proven benefits of play”. The first benefit is that play “is essential for healthy brain development”, citing an animal study that showed a short session of tussle and tumble play in rats was associated with an increase in brain-derived neutrotrophic factor (BDNF), an important protein for proper brain development. Secondly, play “reduces obesity and associated diseases”. Children who played more outside had significant improvements in their BMI. Third, play “helps children manage stress and even recover from trauma”, referring to a study that showed that children assigned to one-on-one play with their teachers had improved behavior and reduced cortisol levels. Play also “helps families bond” and children can learn to regulate their emotions through these parent-child interactions. Lastly, the article explains that play “contributes to academic skills”. Pretend-play in particular is important not only for language development and general knowledge building but also bringing out intrinsic motivation.

The article overall, despite its brevity, accurately highlights some of the main points from the original clinical report regarding the benefits of play and also reviews evidence from a few corresponding research studies. However, the main shortcoming of the article is that, while it is concise and easy for its readers to digest, it leaves out many aspects of “play” that are important for a well-rounded understanding and subsequently taking action. In the *Pediatrics* article, the authors not only discuss the benefits of play but also describe what play is, as well as how play can be incorporated in various settings such as school and home and some of the barriers. There are several categories of play: Object play, Physical/Locomotor Play, Outdoor Play, Social and Pretend Play, and they each contribute to development in unique ways. One of the modern challenges to real play is the immersion in electronic media. The clinical report offers several resources (see below) that pediatricians can give to parents to help limit screen time and maximize active play.

**RESOURCES ON PLAY:**[HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/toddler/fitness/Pages/Caution-Children-at-Play.aspx) *Healthy Guidelines and Activities for Play*   
[The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Enhancing-and-Practicing-Executive-Function-Skills-with-Children-from-Infancy-to-Adolescence-1.pdf) *Online resource on play and executive functioning with specific activities for parents*

Reference:  
The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children. Michael Yogman, Andrew Garner, Jeffrey Hutchinson, Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Roberta Michnick Golinkoff. Pediatrics Aug 2018, e20182058; DOI: 10.1542/peds.2018-2058

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!