

Global Childhood Games

What do kids in different countries do to stay fit and happy?

Many fitness professionals talk about how surprisingly difficult it is to motivate kids to simply *play*. ParticipACTION, a Canadian organization that promotes physical activity, cites lack of time, weather and “screen time” (televisions, computers and mobile devices) as barriers. The following international game sampler offers fresh, inspirational ideas to keep kids moving.

Kids play **Pilolo** in rural parts of Ghana. A leader, a timekeeper and a finish line are chosen, and someone hides pennies (one for each player). The timekeeper waits at the finish line to judge first place. When the leader calls, “Pilolo!” (“time to search for . . .”), players scramble to find a penny and be first to take it across the finish line.



In **Sumatra**, kids play **Semut, Orang, Gajah**. This game is similar to “rock, paper, scissors,” except that pinky finger out is “ant” (*semut*), pointer finger out is “person” (*orang*), and thumb out is “elephant” (*gajah*). Elephant beats person because it is stronger; person steps on ant; and ant crawls into elephant’s ear, defeating it.



In **Pakistan**, children play a tag variation called **Oonch Neech**. The game is played in an outdoor space with lots of “obstacles,” such as tree stumps, rocks and benches. One child (“it”) chooses either *oonch* (“up”) or *neech* (“down”). *Neech* means the ground is safe and runners can be tagged unless they are up (*oonch*) on an obstacle, and vice versa.



Corre, Corre la Guaraca is a Chilean game where kids sit in a circle while one child runs around the outer rim holding a handkerchief. The runner gently drops the handkerchief on a seated child’s back and keeps running. If the runner makes it around the circle before the seated player realizes that the handkerchief is on his or her back, the seated player is out.

