



Increasing Physical Activity in Students: A Tip Sheet for Teachers

Children must be taught healthy and active lifestyles. They do not automatically develop the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviors that lead to regular participation in physical activity.

School-based programs can play an integral role in teaching children lifelong physical activity habits. Since inactive adults have twice the mortality of adults who are at least somewhat active, it's important to teach children how to lead a healthy lifestyle, in hopes that these habits will carry over into adulthood.

Fortunately, teachers have the power to give children the fundamentals for achieving this goal.

Values of physical activity and its contributions to a healthful lifestyle

- Reduces the risk of dying from coronary heart disease (CHD)
- Lowers both total blood cholesterol and triglycerides and may increase high-density lipoproteins (HDL or the "good" cholesterol)
- Lowers the risk of developing high blood pressure
- Lowers the risk of developing non-insulin-dependent (Type II) diabetes mellitus
- Reduces the risk of developing colon cancer
- Helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints
- Helps people achieve and maintain a healthy body weight
- Reduces feelings of depression and anxiety
- Promotes psychological well-being and reduces feelings of stress

The physically educated person

- Has learned skills necessary to perform a variety of physical activities
- Is physically fit (able to perform daily tasks without undue fatigue)
- Participates regularly in physical activity
- Knows the implications of and the benefits from involvement in physical activities

Inactivity among American youth

- Physical activity levels among both girls and boys tend to decline steadily during adolescence.
- Girls and boys perceive the benefits of exercise very differently. Boys often cite competition and girls often cite weight management.
- High school girls are less likely to be vigorously active than are high school boys.
- African-American girls are less active than Caucasian girls.
- Although nearly all children in the United States are enrolled in physical education in elementary school, not all receive instruction of sufficient quantity and quality for fitness and motor skill development.
- Students who do participate in physical education classes spend large amounts of class time being inactive.
- Youth who have physical disabilities often receive little or no encouragement to be physically active.

Exercise recommendations for children

- Children and adolescents should strive for at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days of the week. (Adults should strive for at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity every day, or almost every day.)
- Research has shown it is equally beneficial to engage in 5 to 10 minute bouts of moderate -intensity activity throughout the day, for a total accumulation of at least 60 minutes per day for children and adolescents, and 30 minutes per day for adults.
- Moderate intensity activity refers to a level of effort equivalent to 50 percent to 70 percent of a person's maximum heart rate. To predict maximum heart rate, subtract the person's age from 220 (MHR = 220 – person's age). For example, a 13 year-old student would have an MHR of 207; a 40 year-old teacher would have an MHR of 180.
- Walking briskly or biking for pleasure or transportation, swimming, inline skating, playing frisbee, or doing tasks in the home and garden, such as carrying heavy items and shoveling, may all contribute to accumulated physical activity.

Guidelines for school programs to promote lifelong physical activity

- Establish policies that promote enjoyable, lifelong physical activity among young people.
- Provide physical and social environments that encourage and enable safe and enjoyable physical activity.
- Implement health and physical education curricula and instruction that emphasize enjoyable participation in physical activity and that help students develop the knowledge, attitudes, motor skills, behavioral skills, and confidence needed to adopt and maintain physically active lifestyles.
- Provide extracurricular physical activity programs that meet the needs and interests of all students.
- Include parents and guardians in physical activity instruction and in extracurricular and community physical activity programs.
- Provide training for education, coaching, recreation, health care, and other school and community personnel needed to effectively promote lifelong physical activity.
- Provide a range of developmentally appropriate sports and recreation programs that are attractive to all young people.
- Regularly evaluate school and community physical activity instruction, programs, and facilities.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Guidelines for School and Community Programs to Promote Lifelong Physical Activity Among Young People <http://www.cdc.gov>

Ways to incorporate activity into schools and classrooms

- Encourage classroom teachers to have five-minute fitness breaks in the middle of classes. (This may also help with increasing the attention span of the students.)
- Each morning, have a student present a health current event or provide a health tip to the class.
- Interested teachers can establish clubs and/or intramural activities of competitive and noncompetitive natures such as jump rope, rollerblading, or walking clubs.
- Allow the use of their facilities by community agencies that sponsor physical activity programs or to promote an activity fair set up and run by students.
- Get parents involved by sending home activity homework that parents and children can do together.
- Allow access to facilities before and after school hours and during vacation periods to allow for more social environments of exercise.
- Have a dance-a-thon to raise money for the school or a health-related disease.
- Hold a poster or essay contest for a school wide project.

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