

Our Kids Need to Get Moving!

Stacy Hyndman, B.H.Sc.PT, Physiotherapist

Children should be physically active every day. According to Health Canada, children should participate in 30 minutes of vigorous physical activity and 60 minutes of moderate physical activity each and every day. Most children in Canada are not achieving this goal. In fact, only 4% of schools in Canada have daily physical education, the average Canadian child spends 3-5 hours per day in front of the television or computer and only 60% of children 7-12 years old get enough exercise to grow optimally. ¹ The prevalence of Canadian children (7-13 years old) who are considered overweight increased 50% for boys and 57% for girls between 1981 and 1996. ² The Calgary Health Region recently reported that 23% of preschool girls and 26% of preschool boys are overweight.

These statistics are frightening in and of themselves - but more frightening is the impact that obesity will have on the health and well-being of children as they age. There is a great deal of research that indicates that obesity is a significant contributing factor for the development of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes in adults. Over the past several years, research has started to demonstrate the risks that obesity poses for children as well. The Canadian Pediatric Society reports that 45% of new cases of diabetes in children are type 2 diabetes. ¹ "Adult-onset diabetes" is no longer an adult disease! And, most children with type 2 diabetes are overweight or obese. ³ Other possible risks to the health of children who are overweight or obese include: high blood pressure, high cholesterol, musculoskeletal problems, and lowered self-esteem.

None of this information is likely to come as a shock to those who have read the paper, watched the news, or been to a school lately. There are many children who are not active enough. The real question is - what can we do?



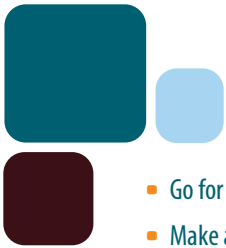
GET MOVING! It seems like a simple answer to a complicated problem - but physical activity is one of the most important ways to maintain health and well-being throughout our lives. Physical activity has many benefits. There are the obvious benefits which are familiar to most people - stronger muscles, stronger hearts & lungs, maintaining a healthy weight, and improved confidence and self-esteem. The others may be more subtle and not as commonly discussed. Daily physical activity for elementary-aged children has been shown to have a positive effect on memory, problem-solving, decision-making and creativity. ⁴ Teens who are active are less likely to smoke or use drugs and alcohol. ⁵ And, learning to enjoy exercise in childhood is a strong predictor of future participation in physical activity. ⁶

We know that physical activity is good for us and we know we need to do more of it. So, how do we incorporate physical activity into each day for our children? Physical education is a good place to start. Beginning in September 2005 Alberta Education is implementing its new Daily Physical Activity Initiative for students in grades 1-9. September 2006 this initiative will be expanded to include students in grades 10-12. The initiative requires schools to provide students with a minimum of 30 minutes of physical activity each day at school. Cheers to Alberta Education for requiring daily physical activity!

At home - there are a number of ways to incorporate activity into the lives of our children. Beyond the usual opportunities for sports at the local recreation centre or community program, there are lots ways to be active.

Here are a few suggestions for ways to enjoy our winter weather:

- Put on some music and dance
- Have your child help you shovel snow
- Build a snowman or make snow angels in your yard
- Go skating or snowboarding or skiing. Just remember to always wear a helmet
- Try snowshoeing



- Go for a walk at the mall or the grocery store when it is really cold
- Make a target and throw snowballs at it. Just don't hit your friends or a window!!
- Play catch with a soft ball or beanbag at home

References:

1. Health Active Living Committee, Canadian Paediatric Society. Health Active Living for Children and Youth. *Paediatrics & Child Health* 2002;7(5):339-345.
2. Tremblay, MS, Willms, JD. Secular Trends in the Body Mass Index of Canadian Children. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. 2000; 163(11), 1429-1433.
3. American Diabetes Association. Type 2 Diabetes in Children and Adolescents. *Pediatrics*. 2000; 105: 671-680.
4. Keays, J.J. and Allison K.R. The Effects of Regular Moderate to Vigorous Physical Activity on Student Outcomes: A Review. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 1995; 86(1).
5. The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 1999, and The Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 1998.
6. Hofstetter, C. R., Hovell, M. F., Sallis, J. F. Social learning correlates of exercise self-efficacy: Early experiences with physical activity. *Social Science and Medicine*, 1990; 31, 1169-1176.

Resources:

- Active Healthy Kids Canada
<http://www.activehealthykids.ca/>
- Canadian Pediatric Society
www.cps.ca
- Health Canada - Physical Activity Guide for Children and Youth
www.healthcanada.ca/paguide
- Coalition for Active Living
www.activeliving.ca
- Ski & Snowboard Canada - information on Grade 5 Snowpass
www.skicanada.org
- Resorts of the Canadian Rockies -
information on Husky Snow Stars Grade 2 FunPass
www.skircr.com

