

# Physical Activity and the Health of Young People

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Division of Adolescent and School Health

## Benefits of Regular Physical Activity

- Helps build and maintain healthy bones and muscles<sup>1</sup>
- Helps reduce the risk of developing obesity and chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.<sup>1</sup>
- Reduces feelings of depression and anxiety and promotes psychological well-being<sup>1</sup>

## Long-Term Consequences of Physical Inactivity

- Overweight and obesity, influenced by poor diet and inactivity, are significantly associated with an increased risk of diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, asthma, arthritis, and poor health status.<sup>2</sup>
- Physical inactivity increases the risk of dying prematurely, dying of heart disease, and developing diabetes, colon cancer, and high blood pressure.<sup>1</sup>

## Overweight Among Youth

- The prevalence of overweight among children aged 6-11 has more than doubled in the past 20 years, increasing from 7% in 1980 to 16% in 2002.<sup>3,4</sup>
- Children and adolescents who are overweight are more likely to be overweight or obese as adults;<sup>5,6,7</sup> overweight adults are at increased risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, some types of cancer, and gallbladder disease.<sup>8</sup>

## Participation in Physical Activity by Young People

- During the 7 days preceding the survey, 77% of children aged 9-13 reported participating in free-time physical activity, and 39% reported participating in organized physical activity.<sup>9</sup>
- Sixty-three percent of high school students participate in sufficient vigorous physical activity<sup>a</sup>, and 25% participate in sufficient moderate physical activity.<sup>b,10</sup>
- Participation in physical activity declines as children get older.
- Sixty-seven percent of high school students met the national recommendations for both vigorous and moderate physical activity in 2003.<sup>10</sup>

**Percentage of High School Students Participating in Different Types of Physical Activity, by Sex, 2003<sup>10</sup>**

Type of Activity	Girls	Boys
Sufficient vigorous physical activity <sup>a</sup>	55%	70%
Sufficient moderate physical activity <sup>b</sup>	22%	27%
Sufficient strengthening exercises <sup>c</sup>	43%	60%
Played on a sports team <sup>d</sup>	51%	64%

a Physical activities that caused sweating and hard breathing, that were performed for 20 minutes or more on at least 3 of the 7 days preceding the survey.

b Physical activities that did not cause sweating or hard breathing, that were performed for 30 minutes or more on at least 5 of the 7 days preceding the survey.

c For example, push-ups, sit-ups, or weightlifting on at least 3 of the 7 days preceding the survey to strengthen or tone their muscles.

d Run by their school or community groups during the 12 months preceding the survey.



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## Participation in Physical Education Classes

- Over half (56%) of U.S. high school students (71% of 9th graders but only 40% of 12th graders) were enrolled in a physical education class in 2003.<sup>10</sup>
- The percentage of high school students who attended physical education classes daily decreased from 42% in 1991 to 25% in 1995, and has remained stable at that level until 2003 (28%). In 2003, 38% of 9th graders but only 18% of 12th graders attended a daily physical education class.<sup>10</sup>
- Among the 56% of students who are enrolled in a physical education class, 80% exercised or played sports for 20 minutes or more during an average class.<sup>10</sup>

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