

Active Living Research

Using Evidence to Prevent Childhood Obesity
and Create Active Communities

ARTICLE SUMMARY

February 2013

Reaching the Goal of 60 Minutes of Physical Activity for Children

Introduction

Physical activity has many health benefits in children, including increased physical fitness, reduced body fat, reduced risk of heart disease, stronger bones, and improved mental health. Despite overwhelming evidence of the health benefits of physical activity, most American youth are not meeting the national recommendation of 60 minutes per day. Lack of physical activity has contributed to high obesity rates among children.

There are many ways of increasing physical activity among children, but identifying specific ways to achieve the 60-minute goal has not been easy. This study estimates the number of minutes in physical activity that different approaches, such as walking or biking to schools, increasing physical education time, or having access to parks, could provide for children.

Key Findings

The key finding of the study is that schools and communities can reach the 60-minute goal in several ways. Three primary ways, such as mandatory daily physical education, classroom physical activity breaks and walking or biking to school, can alone provide 58 minutes of physical activity. The chart below shows other ways of reaching the 60-minute goal (Figure 1).

Methods

The authors conducted a literature review to identify strategies for increasing physical activity in children and adolescents. An expert panel read the research, rated the quality of the studies, and estimated the energy expenditure resulting from 10 different approaches to increase physical activity. The minutes of physical activity resulting from individual approaches were calculated using averages from various studies.

SOURCE

Basset, D.R. et al. (2013). Estimated Energy Expenditures for School-Based Policies and Active Living. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 44(2), 108-113.

For full study, go to:

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0749379712008057>

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Implications

This information can help legislators, school officials, and other policy-makers make well-informed decisions that can enhance physical activity in youth. Several school policies (physical education classes, recess, etc.) and built environment changes (bike lanes near schools, access to parks, etc.) have been shown to increase the amount of time children spend being physically active during a normal school day. If multiple policies were implemented, it could help children achieve, or even exceed, the national guidelines for physical activity in youth. Each school or community could select a combination of policies to reach the 60-minute goal.

Figure 1

Minutes of Physical Activity Gained Per Day Resulting from Various Policy and Environmental Changes

