



**Elmesmari, Rabha and Martin, Anne and Reilly, John (2018) Comparison of accelerometer measured levels of physical activity and sedentary time between obese and non-obese children and adolescents : a systematic review. BMC Pediatrics. ISSN 1471-2431 (In Press) ,**

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**Comparison of accelerometer measured levels of physical activity and sedentary time between obese and non-obese children and adolescents: A systematic review**

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26

**Abstract**

27 **Background:** Obesity has been hypothesized to be associated with reduced moderate-  
28 to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) and increased sedentary time (ST). It is  
29 important to assess whether, and the extent to which, levels of MVPA and ST are  
30 suboptimal among children and adolescents with obesity. The primary objective of  
31 this study was to examine accelerometer-measured time spent in MVPA and ST of  
32 children and adolescents with obesity, compared with MVPA recommendations, and  
33 with non-obese peers.

34 **Method:** An extensive search was carried out in Medline, Cochrane library,  
35 EMBASE, SPORTDiscus, and CINAHL, from 2000-2015. Study selection and  
36 appraisal: studies with accelerometer-measured MVPA and/or ST (at least 3 days and  
37 6 hours/day) in free-living obese children and adolescents (0-19 years) were included.  
38 Study quality was assessed formally. Meta-analyses were planned for all outcomes  
39 but were precluded due to the high levels of heterogeneity across studies. Therefore,  
40 narrative syntheses were employed for all the outcomes.

41 **Results:** Out of 1503 records, 26 studies were eligible with a total (n =14739  
42 participants; n =3523 with obesity); 6/26 studies involved children aged 0-9 years and  
43 18/26 involved adolescents aged 10.1-19 years. In the participants with obesity, the  
44 time spent in MVPA was consistently below the recommended 60 minutes/day and  
45 ST was generally high regardless of the participant's age and gender. Comparison  
46 with controls suggested that the time spent in MVPA was significantly lower in  
47 children and adolescents with obesity, though differences were relatively small.  
48 Levels of MVPA in the obese and non-obese were consistently below  
49 recommendations. There were no marked differences in ST between obese and non-  
50 obese peers.

51 **Conclusions:** MVPA in children and adolescents with obesity tends to be well below  
52 international recommendations. Substantial effort is likely to be required to achieve  
53 the recommended levels of MVPA among obese individuals in obesity treatment  
54 interventions.

55

56 This systematic review has been registered on PROSPERO (International Database of  
57 Prospective Register Systematic Reviews; registration number CRD42015026882).

58

59

## Background

60 The prevalence of obesity among children and adolescents is now very high in  
61 both developing and developed countries [1, 2] and is a significant public health and  
62 clinical concern [3] that is attracting much research attention [4]. Obesity is known to  
63 have a significant impact on both physical and psychological health and children and  
64 adolescents with obesity face a number of health, social, and psychological problems  
65 [2, 5, 6]. Prevention of childhood obesity is a public health priority while treatment is  
66 becoming an increasingly important clinical issue.

67 A number of health behaviors have been associated with risk of obesity [7].  
68 Poor diet, lack of physical activity (PA) and increased sedentary time (ST) have been  
69 linked to the development and maintenance of childhood and adolescent obesity [8-  
70 11]. Many evidence-based guidelines focusing on the amount of PA, particularly  
71 moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity (MVPA) required to produce health  
72 benefits, have been developed. These guidelines commonly recommend 60 minutes of  
73 MVPA as a daily minimum (7 days a week) for school-age children and adolescents  
74 [12-15].

75           Accelerometry currently represents the most accurate, inexpensive, and  
76 reliable method for objectively measuring both the amount and intensity of PA and  
77 amount of sedentary behavior (SB) [16, 17]. There have been many surveys and  
78 studies on the levels and adequacy of MVPA in healthy-weight children and  
79 adolescents [18, 19]. Since MVPA and ST are also important to health in those with  
80 obesity, and since obesity has been hypothesized to be associated with reduced  
81 MVPA [20] these variables need to be reviewed for children and adolescents with  
82 obesity. Whether and to what extent obesity in childhood and adolescence is  
83 associated with reduced objectively measured MVPA and ST/SB remains unclear, in  
84 part because of the lack of a synthesis of the evidence on this topic. Many studies  
85 have addressed the topic using subjective measurement methods, and/or considering  
86 the overweight as obese, and/or focusing on total volume of physical activity rather  
87 than MVPA. It is important to assess objectively measured time spent in MVPA and  
88 ST in children and adolescents with obesity. The primary aim of the present  
89 systematic review was therefore to determine obese children's and adolescents'  
90 habitual amount of time spent in MVPA, and examine whether those living with  
91 obesity met the current MVPA recommendation for health of a minimum of 60  
92 minutes per day [14, 21]. Secondary aims were to examine time spent in  
93 accelerometer-measured SB by children and adolescents with obesity, and to  
94 determine whether MVPA and ST in obese children and adolescents were different  
95 from the non-obese peers.

96

97

## **Methods**

98 **Registration of systematic reviews**

99 This systematic literature review was performed in accordance with the Preferred  
100 Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews (PRISMA) guidelines [22]. The review  
101 protocol was registered on PROSPERO (registration number CRD42015026882), the  
102 international prospective register for systematic reviews ([http://www.crd.york.ac.uk/  
103 NIHR\\_PROSPERO](http://www.crd.york.ac.uk/NIHR_PROSPERO)).

104

### 105 **Literature search**

106 The literature search was conducted searching for English language peer-reviewed  
107 studies using the five most relevant electronic databases from 2000 up to March 2015  
108 (accelerometry became more widely used in research from the early 2000's):  
109 MEDLINE OVID; Cochrane library; EMBASE; SPORTSDiscus and CINAHL by  
110 AM. The literature search in the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials is  
111 shown in Table 1, and was adapted as required for the other databases. Full literature  
112 search details are available from the corresponding author on request. The electronic  
113 search was complemented by reference citation tracking (forward and backward) of  
114 the included studies and of previous reviews.

115

116 Table1 about here

117

### 118 **Inclusion criteria**

119 To be eligible for inclusion in the review, papers had to meet all of the following  
120 criteria as per the PICOS principles: Population: children and adolescents aged from  
121 0-19 years as defined by the WHO; Intervention or exposure: children or adolescent  
122 classified as obese. Obesity had to be defined using an acceptable objective method,  
123 e.g. defined as having a body mass index (BMI)  $\geq$  95th percentile for children of the

124 same sex and age, or defined as the equivalent of 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> International Obesity Task  
125 Force (IOTF definition), or defined as obese relative to World Health Organization  
126 (WHO) BMI for age and sex charts); Comparison: habitual amount time spent in  
127 MVPA and/or ST of non-obese children and adolescents; Outcomes: habitual amount  
128 time spent in MVPA and/or ST measured by accelerometer and reported in the form  
129 of minutes/day of MVPA or ST; MVPA and its relationship to the 60 minutes/day  
130 recommended. All study designs were considered eligible: cross-sectional,  
131 longitudinal, case-control studies and intervention studies were eligible if pre-  
132 intervention data could be extracted.

133

#### 134 **Exclusion criteria**

135 We excluded studies that included only overweight participants, combined  
136 overweight and obese groups, or included participants with any known barrier or  
137 limitation to physical activity (e.g. physical disability). Studies that used subjective  
138 methods, objective (e.g. doubly labelled water) or direct observation methods apart  
139 from accelerometer measurements were excluded.

140 Since the aim of the review was to examine habitual levels of MVPA and ST, studies  
141 that measured these variables for less than 6 hours per day or over two days or less  
142 were excluded. Recommendations currently exist for habitual (overall) MVPA rather  
143 than MVPA during specific domains (e.g. the after school period) and so studies that  
144 focused only on specific periods of the day (e.g. school activity only, or outdoor  
145 activity only, or weekend activity only, or weekday activity only, or after-school only)  
146 were also excluded. A detailed description of the eligibility criteria is given in  
147 [Additional file 1].

148

149 **Study selection**

150 Titles, abstracts, and full-text articles were screened in duplicate for eligibility by RE  
151 and JYP and disagreements were resolved through discussions with other reviewers  
152 when required. Reference lists of eligible studies were examined for potentially  
153 eligible studies, and studies that cited eligible studies were identified and tested for  
154 eligibility. The reviewers were not blinded to authors or journal of publication.  
155 Reasons for exclusion are summarised in the study flow diagram (Figure 1) and  
156 available in details from the corresponding author on request.

157

158 **Data extraction**

159 A standardised data extraction form was used to populate the evidence tables by RE  
160 and repeated by JJR and JYP. The extracted items were: first author, publication year,  
161 country, study design, sample group, comparison group-if applicable, accelerometer  
162 type, cut points for MVPA and ST, finding of MVPA (minutes/day) and ST  
163 (minutes/day or %) data, summary and author conclusions. International  
164 recommendations are usually for the achievement of at least 60 minutes of MVPA  
165 every day, but in the eligible studies the achievement of MVPA recommendations  
166 was never operationalised in this way. In most studies that referred to the achievement  
167 of MVPA recommendations, the mean or median daily MVPA (minutes/day) was  
168 provided, and so this was used as a proxy for achievement of recommendations in the  
169 present study.

170

171 **Data analysis and synthesis**

172 We considered the data for meta-analysis but identified a substantial level of  
173 statistical heterogeneity between the studies ( $I^2$  statistic >70%) that led to the decision



174 not to present the combined results of individual studies. Hence, we performed a  
175 narrative synthesis of the data and present the findings in tabular, textual and  
176 graphical form. Data were synthesised by the age and sex of the subgroups as those  
177 are factors known to be strongly associated with both the exposure variable, obesity,  
178 and the outcomes, MVPA and ST, and so might explain some of the observed  
179 findings. The age subgroup was categorised according to the WHO definition of  
180 children and adolescence, i.e. as children aged 0-9.9 years old and adolescents aged  
181 10.1-19 years old. Data for boys, girls and mixed-sex studies are reported separately  
182 where possible.

### 183 **Quality assessment**

184 Eligible articles were assessed for methodological quality using a 15-item quality  
185 assessment scale as shown in [Additional file 2], collapsed to 6 items for scoring, with  
186 higher scores suggesting higher study quality. Each eligible study was assessed by  
187 RE, and disagreements were resolved by discussion with JJR and JYP. The quality  
188 assessment scale was modified from the methodological quality assessment scale of  
189 Tooth *et al.* [23]. This is a reliable and valid tool for assessing the quality of  
190 observational studies. It was considered initially for use in its original form, which  
191 consists of over 30 items. The modifications to the original scale were made to focus  
192 quality assessment on issues of particular importance to accelerometry measurement  
193 of physical activity. The modified Tooth *et al.* tool has been used in several recent  
194 systemic reviews of physical activity, all of which have reduced the number of items  
195 in the quality assessment to 8-17 items, which make up the quality score [24-28].

196

197

## **Results**

198 **Search results**

199 The PRISMA flow diagram with the numbers of included and excluded articles at  
200 each step of the review process is provided in Figure 1. Table 2 and 3 provide a brief  
201 summary of all studies included in this systematic review. Of 1503 papers identified  
202 in the initial review of the five databases, 467 were selected for full-text screening and  
203 of these, 22 met the inclusion criteria. A further four eligible studies were identified  
204 from searching reference of included studies and of previous reviews, giving a total of  
205 26 studies which met the inclusion criteria.

206

207 **Fig 1: The PRISMA flow diagram with numbers of included and excluded**  
208 **articles at each step of the review process.**

209

#### 210 **Studies characteristics**

211 Of the 26 included studies: six studies involved children, 18 studies involved  
212 adolescents and two studies involved both children and adolescents. Further, 22/26  
213 compared MVPA data in those with obesity with a non-obese peers, while 13/26  
214 studies also provided data on accelerometer measured ST; 10/13 studies compared ST  
215 data in those with obesity with non-obese peers. **Measurement protocol:** The  
216 ActiGraph was the most common accelerometer type used to measure habitual MVPA  
217 and/or ST, used in 20/26 studies, though with a variety of different ActiGraph models  
218 and approaches to data collection and reduction. Of the remaining six studies: three  
219 used the Actical accelerometer [29-31]; two the Triaxial Research Tracker (RT3)  
220 accelerometer [32, 33]; and one the Actiwatch accelerometer [34].

221

#### 222 **MVPA and ST in obese children**

223 Eight eligible studies involved obese children, with a total sample size of 2138  
224 children (478 with obesity; 131 boys, 136 girls and 211 no sex specified). Two of the

225 eligible studies were clinical samples with study participants recruited from outpatient  
226 clinics. Eligible studies were from different nations with one study from Asia [35],  
227 three from Canada and USA [36-38] and four from Europe [32, 39-41], with the study  
228 characteristics summarized in Table 2. In four studies, MVPA data of boys and girls  
229 were reported separately while in other four studies MVPA data were reported as  
230 mixed sex. 7/8 of eligible studies reported mean daily time spent in MVPA in  
231 minutes; in four studies mean time spent in MVPA was < 60 minutes/day.  
232 Furthermore, in 2/7 of the eligible studies, children with obesity reached or exceeded  
233 60 minutes of MVPA per day [37, 38], while in one study they came close to a mean  
234 of 60 minutes/day of MVPA [36]. In all cases time spent in MVPA in the children  
235 who were obese was compared to the comparison group (non-obese peers). In only  
236 one study was the mean time spent in MVPA similar in both groups [37]; in three  
237 studies, time spent in MVPA was significant lower in children with obesity than in the  
238 comparison group [35, 36, 39], while in two studies time spent in MVPA of children  
239 with obesity was lower than the comparison group but differences were not  
240 significant [38, 40]. In the other 2 studies, time spent in MVPA of children with  
241 obesity was different in terms of gender compared to the comparison group: Hussey et  
242 al reported that mean MVPA was significantly lower in boys with obesity but not in  
243 girls [32]; while Vale et al reported that mean time spent in MVPA was significantly  
244 lower in girls with obesity but not in boys [41] compared to the comparison groups.

245

246 Table 2 about here

247

248 With respect to ST, 4/8 eligible studies reported on accelerometer-measured time  
249 spent in SB of children with obesity with a total sample size of 536 children (191 with

250 obesity; 28 boys, 32 girls and 131 no sex specified). In one study, ST data of boys and  
251 girls was reported separately while in other the data were reported as mixed sex.  
252 Across all four eligible studies, mean time spent in SB was >70% of waking time [32,  
253 35, 39, 40]. In 3/4 of the studies ST was significantly higher in the obese than the  
254 non-obese groups, although, in one study it was significantly higher in boys with  
255 obesity but not in girls [32]. In one study ST was similar in both groups [39].

256

### 257 **MVPA and ST in obese adolescents**

258 Twenty of the eligible studies involved adolescents, with a total sample size of 12601  
259 adolescents (3045 with obesity; 1615 boys, 1575 girls and 195 no sex specified). Four  
260 of the eligible studies were clinical samples with participants recruited from  
261 outpatient clinics. Eligible studies were from different nations with one study from  
262 Asia [42], 11 from Canada and the USA, and eight from Europe, with the study  
263 characteristics summarized in Table 3. In 12/20 studies, MVPA data of boys and girls  
264 were reported separately; in 6/20 studies MVPA data were reported as mixed sex,  
265 while the other two studies involved only adolescent girls. All 20 eligible studies  
266 reported mean daily time spent in MVPA in minutes and in these studies it ranged  
267 from a low of 16 (SD 4) minutes/day [36] to a high of 140 (SD 47) minutes/day [43].  
268 In only 2/ 20 studies did daily time spent in MVPA reach an average of at least 60  
269 minutes [43, 44] in the adolescents who were obese. A total of 16/20 eligible studies  
270 compared time spent in MVPA of those with obesity with a comparison group: in  
271 3/16 time spent in MVPA was similar between obese and non-obese groups, while in  
272 10/16 mean time spent in MVPA was significantly lower in adolescents with obesity  
273 than in non-obese peers.

274

275 Table 3 about here

276

277 In regard to time spent in SB, nine out of the 20 eligible studies reported on  
278 accelerometer measured ST in adolescents with obesity with a total sample size of  
279 5484 adolescents (1101 with obesity; 546 boys and 555 girls), as summarised in Table  
280 3. In 8/9 studies, ST data of boys and girls were reported separately and 1/9 study  
281 involved only adolescent girls. In 7/9 studies, mean daily ST was reported in minutes  
282 and in these studies it ranged from a low of 345 (SD 122) minutes/day [34] to a high  
283 of 731 (SD 110) minutes/day [30]. In 6/9 studies there was a comparison group; in 2/6  
284 studies mean daily ST was similar in obese and non-obese groups [42, 45]; in 2/6  
285 studies ST was significantly higher in those with obesity than in the non-obese  
286 comparison groups [34, 46], while in the other 2/6 studies it was higher in the  
287 adolescents with obesity, but not significantly so [47, 48].

288

289 A graphical synthesis of the mean differences and 95% CI of time spent in MVPA by  
290 sex for both children and adolescents with obesity and non-obese groups, is shown in  
291 Figure 2. A summary of the mean differences and 95% CI of time spent in SB by sex  
292 for both children and adolescents with obesity and non-obese groups, is shown in  
293 Figure 3.

294

295 **Fig 2: Forest plot of the comparison of moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical**  
296 **activity between children and adolescents with obesity and non-obese**  
297 **participants by sex.**

298 SD: standard deviation; CI: 95% Confidence interval.

299

300 **Fig 3: Forest plot of the comparison of sedentary time between children and**  
301 **adolescents with obesity and non-obese participants by sex.**

302 SD: standard deviation; CI: 95% Confidence interval.

303

#### 304 **Study quality assessment**

305 Study quality assessment summaries are given in [Additional file 3]. One study scored  
306 4/6. Twelve studies scored 5/6 while 13 scored 6/6 on study quality.

307

308

### 309 **Discussion**

310 This systematic review provided clear evidence that children and adolescents with  
311 obesity have lower than the recommended levels of MVPA. In most of the eligible  
312 studies, daily time spent in MVPA averaged less than the 60 minutes/day  
313 recommended in many guidelines. When comparing MVPA level between obese and  
314 non-obese peers, the findings indicated that daily MVPA was lower in children and  
315 adolescents with obesity.

316

317 In reviewing the methodology of the studies, it is noteworthy that the precise  
318 accelerometer methodology was often not stated clearly, or sometimes not stated at  
319 all, in the eligible studies particularly with respect to the the cut-off used to define  
320 MVPA (Table 2 and 3). However, mean time spent in MVPA was broadly similar  
321 within studies that employed comparable accelerometer methods. For example, in the  
322 two eligible Actigraph studies which used a cut-off of 2000 counts per minutes (cpm)  
323 to define MVPA (Maggio et al [40] , age 4-17 years old, and Ruiz et al [46], age 12-  
324 17 year olds) mean daily time spent in MVPA was 60 minutes/day in the boys with  
325 obesity in the sample studied by Ruiz et al [46], and 60 minutes/day in the boys with  
326 obesity studied by Maggio et al [40]. Both of these studies might suggest the tentative

327 conclusion that time spent in MVPA is relatively high in adolescents who are obese,  
328 possibly suggesting that adolescence and/or obesity do not present major barriers to  
329 MVPA. In contrast, three of the eligible Actigraph studies used higher MVPA cut-  
330 offs which ranged between 2912cpm in 11-12 year olds: Decelis et al [47] and  
331 3200cpm Hughes et al [39] and Wafa et al [35] in 8 and 9 year olds respectively.  
332 These studies found that mean daily time spent in MVPA was 30 minutes in boys and  
333 19 minutes in girls with obesity [47] and a median of 16 minutes for both sexes  
334 combined in the study by Hughes et al [39] and 5 minutes/day in the study by Wafa et  
335 al [35]. The majority of children and adolescents with obesity achieved means of < 30  
336 minutes of daily time spent in MVPA in studies with cut-offs of  $\geq 2912$  cpm [32, 38,  
337 39, 43, 44].

338 Further, it should be noted that recommendations for MVPA state that 60 minutes per  
339 day is a minimum every day (e.g. usually operationalized as 7 days in a week) [49-  
340 51], but adherence to recommendations was never operationalized in this way in any  
341 of the 26 eligible studies. We therefore used a mean or median daily MVPA of 60  
342 minutes as a proxy for adherence, though this is conservative because in many  
343 individuals where 60 minutes MVPA/day was reached as an average, time spent in  
344 MVPA would have fallen below 60 minutes/day on at least one of the monitored  
345 days.

346

347 With respect to sedentary time, the present review found that studies fairly  
348 consistently reported that children and adolescents with obesity accumulated a high  
349 amount of ST during their waking hours, ranging typically between 65-90 % of their  
350 waking monitoring time: 10 hours was the mean daily ST in all 13/26 studies, which  
351 reaches or exceeds typical Actigraph measured levels of ST in North-American adults

352 from surveys such as NHANES. All eligible studies, which had comparison groups,  
353 found ST was fairly consistent with no marked differences between obese and non-  
354 obese peers.

355

356 In the present systematic review, the level of heterogeneity between eligible studies  
357 made it impossible to combine data in a formal meta-analysis. The heterogeneity  
358 noted was due to differences in the location of the studies, differences in the way  
359 obesity was defined (different BMI cut-off points and different reference data), or  
360 differences in accelerometer models and methodology. Therefore, we narratively  
361 synthesized the differences in the time spent in MVPA and ST between obese and  
362 control groups by age and sex. Additionally, future research would benefit from an  
363 attempt to obtain the original study participant data and to reanalyse that with a  
364 common methodology, though this was beyond the present study.

365

#### 366 **Comparisons with other studies:**

367 We believe that the present study is the first systematic review to ask whether or not  
368 levels of accelerometer measured MVPA are adequate in children and adolescents  
369 with obesity, and whether time spent in MVPA and ST differed between obese and  
370 comparison groups based on accelerometer data. There are therefore no directly  
371 comparable studies. However, our findings are consistent with some studies on the  
372 correlates and determinants of objectively MVPA [52, 53], and consistent with a  
373 growing belief that obesity is associated with reduced MVPA and that low MVPA  
374 could be both a cause of obesity and a consequence of obesity, i.e., “bidirectional  
375 causation” [20, 54, 55].

376



377 **Review and evidence strengths and weaknesses**

378 The evidence considered by our review had a number of strengths. Firstly, it  
379 investigated the accelerometer-measured time spent in MVPA and ST of children and  
380 adolescents with obesity, with clear definitions of obesity so that samples included in  
381 the review were not contaminated by the inclusion of overweight but non-obese  
382 individuals. Secondly, there are several methodological strengths to this study.  
383 Studies were identified from an extensive search of the published literature conducted  
384 in a range of databases, over the last 15 years, covering the time when accelerometers  
385 started to become available and popular in PA research and, more recently, sedentary  
386 behavior research. The broad definition of search terms applied across multiple  
387 databases enabled the searching and identification across many potential studies with  
388 no limitations on place of publication, sample size or country of origin. Restricting  
389 eligibility to studies using accelerometry was important in increasing confidence in  
390 the measurement of MVPA [19, 56-58]. The included studies were in general rated as  
391 being of high or very high methodological quality with respect to their accelerometry  
392 methods. Also, in some cases the eligible studies were based on large nationally  
393 representative samples or surveys another strength in terms of generalizability.

394

395 There were some sources of weakness in our systematic review. Firstly, since studies  
396 had to be published in peer-reviewed journals in English, this may have excluded  
397 some relevant evidence. The generalisability of review results is subject to certain  
398 limitations; for instance, eligible studies in our systematic review were from high-  
399 income nations, and we lacked data from low-middle income countries. Most of the  
400 included studies were based on relatively small samples of obese children and  
401 adolescents with a total (n = 14739 participants; n = 3523 with obesity) and their

402 power to estimate habitual MVPA might have been limited, and thus the extent to  
403 which the results observed are generalizable to the general obese paediatric  
404 population is unclear. Our method for assessing the quality of eligible studies has  
405 been used in variously adapted forms in a number of other recent accelerometry  
406 systematic reviews [24-28] in which the original 15 item scale has been collapsed to 6  
407 items. The process of collapsing these 15 items to a six-item scale might have reduced  
408 the possibility of identifying differences in quality between studies.

409 The method of quality assessment in our review, in which the original 15 item scale  
410 has been collapsed to 6 items, has been used in several accelerometry systematic  
411 reviews [24-28]. However, the process of collapsing collapsing 15 items to a six-item  
412 might have reduced the possibility of identifying differences in quality between  
413 studies.

414

415 Eligible studies generally obtained MVPA and ST data using the ActiGraph  
416 accelerometer, but methods used varied between studies. Methodological differences  
417 include: the definition of epoch, the number of hours and days of data constituting a  
418 valid/acceptable data set, MVPA and ST cut-points, and the choice of non-wear  
419 criteria. These methodological variation tends to produce meaningful differences in  
420 MVPA and ST estimates between studies [16] and also make it difficult to compare  
421 across studies. However, while there were multiple differences between studies in  
422 accelerometry methodology (e.g. in epochs, cut-points, handling of non-wear time,  
423 duration of accelerometry monitoring), in all cases the methods were the same within  
424 studies between the obese and non-obese comparison groups, so these methodological  
425 differences probably had limited effect on the ability of studies to identify differences  
426 in MVPA and ST between the obese and non-obese. Finally, the validity of  
427 accelerometry (in particular hip-worn accelerometry, the method in almost all eligible  
428 studies) to determine ST is less well established than the validity of this placement for

429 measurement of MVPA [59]. Hip-worn accelerometers are not designed to measure  
430 posture, and devices such as inclinometers may provide improved measurement.  
431 Accelerometers are used widely to measure ST though, and there is some evidence of  
432 validity for group-comparisons as here (obese vs non-obese comparisons) [9,16 ].

433

434

435

### **Conclusions**

436 In summary, the data presented in our review demonstrated that a high percentage of  
437 obese children and adolescents did not achieve the minimum amount of 60 minutes  
438 per day MVPA that is recommended in guidelines and tended to spend what appeared  
439 to be the vast majority of their waking hours sedentary. Children and adolescents with  
440 obesity were generally slightly less physically active and slightly more sedentary  
441 compared to comparison groups, though the present review cannot test whether they  
442 were less active or more sedentary before becoming obese.

443

444 Given the many and varied health and non-health benefits of MVPA in children and  
445 youth [60, 61], and emerging evidence that ST influences health outcomes in children  
446 and adolescents [62, 63] the present review highlights the need to focus on increasing  
447 MVPA and reducing ST among children and adolescents with obesity, and the  
448 importance of raising these issues in clinical settings as part of treatment for obesity.  
449 Treatment of childhood and adolescent obesity should clearly involve a focus on  
450 increasing MVPA and reducing ST as recommended in multiple evidence based  
451 treatment and prevention guidelines published in recent years.

452

453 **List of abbreviations**

454	Body mass index	BMI
455	Moderate-to-vigorous physical activity	MVPA and increased
456	Physical activity	PA
457	Sedentary behavior	SB
458	Sedentary Time	ST

459

## 460 **Declarations**

461 **Ethics approval and consent to participate:** Not applicable.

462

463 **Consent for publication:** Not applicable.

464

465 **Availability of data and materials:** The datasets used and/or analysed during this  
466 systematic review are included in this published article and its supplementary  
467 information files. In regard the full literature search details are available from the  
468 corresponding author on request.

469

470 **Competing Interests:** Statement for all authors: there is no potential Conflict of  
471 Interest to disclose and there are no financial relationships relevant to this article to  
472 disclose.

## 473 **Authors' Contributions:**

474 **RE** conceptualized and designed the study, performed screening, extracted the data,  
475 and assessed the methodological quality of included articles drafted the initial  
476 manuscript.

477 **AM** conducted literature search, reviewed and revised the manuscript.

478 **JR** conceptualized and designed the study, and coordinated and supervised data  
479 collection, critically reviewed and revised the manuscript.

480 **JP** conceptualized and designed the study, screened shortlisted articles to ensure no  
481 missing articles, critically reviewed and revised the manuscript.

482 All authors approved the final manuscript as submitted.

483

484 **Funding:** no funding

485

486 **Acknowledgements:** Not applicable.

487

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 670

### 671 **Figure legends**

672 Figure 1: The PRISMA flow diagram with numbers of included and excluded articles  
 673 at each step of the review process.

674 Figure 2: Forest plot of the comparison of moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical  
 675 activity between children and adolescents with obesity and non-obese participants by  
 676 sex. SD: standard deviation; CI: 95% Confidence interval.

677

678 Figure 3: Forest plot of the comparison of sedentary time between children and  
 679 adolescents with obesity and non-obese participants by sex. SD: standard deviation;  
 680 CI: 95% Confidence interval.

681

### 682 **Additional files**

683 Additional file 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for selection of studies.

684 MVPA: Moderate-to-Vigorous Intensity Physical Activity; PA: physical activity; SB:  
 685 sedentary behavior.

686

687 Additional file 2. Study Quality Assessment Criteria, modified from Tooth *et al* (22).

688 MVPA: Moderate-to-Vigorous Intensity Physical Activity

689

690 Additional file 3. Methodological quality assessment of the included studies.

691 + Indicates that a criterion was satisfied; – indicates that a criterion was not satisfied.

692 1, described sample recruitment?; 2, description of the sample?; 3, attrition of sample

693 described?; 4, data collection and reduction described?; 5, MVPA definition given?;

694 6, MVPA results given?; \* Studies are listed based on diseases groups.