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Perception and reality: meeting Australia's physical activity guidelines for 12-18 year olds

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Background

Governments regularly publish empirically derived minimum physical activity (PA) guidelines for youth, in response to the ongoing trend of youth physical inactivity. The purpose of this investigation was to explore parents' awareness of the national PA guidelines for youth, and adolescents' and their parents' perceptions of adolescent PA, and compare these to self-reported adolescent PA.

Methods

A total of 115 adolescents (aged 12-14) and their parents completed questionnaire assessments. Parents responded to questions concerning their awareness of the national PA guidelines, and whether they believed their child to be sufficiently active. Adolescents completed the International Physical Activity Questionnaire for Adolescents, and questions concerning their perceived level of PA. Adolescents were deemed sufficiently active if they participated in an average of at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous PA each day.

Results

Overall, 104 (90.4%) adolescents and their parents had complete data sets and were included in the analysis. Of the 45 (43.3%) sufficiently and 59 (56.7%) insufficiently active adolescents, 42 (93.3%) and 41 (69.5%) respectively believed that they were active enough for good general health. Additionally, 41 (91.1%) parents of active and 44 (74.6%) parents of inactive adolescents either agreed or strongly agreed that their child participates in sufficient PA for good general health. Twenty-four (53.3%) parents of active adolescents were unaware of the national PA guidelines, with 10 (22.2%) neither aware or unaware, and 11 (24.4%) aware. Similar results were found for the parents of inactive adolescents with 31 (52.5%) unaware, 17 (28.8%) neither aware or unaware, and 11 (18.6%) aware.

Discussion

These results suggest that the youth PA guidelines are being inadequately received by both adolescents, and their parents. Opportunities to effectively communicate these guidelines such as embedment in curriculum for adolescents, or the dissemination of materials for parents, should be maximised by appropriate authorities.

Australia's Physical Activity Recommendations for 12-18 Year olds



Walking, skateboarding, playing sport and heaps of other activities are not only good for you, they give you a chance to spend time with friends and make new ones. So get active, enjoy life and have fun!

Great reasons to be active

Being active is good for you in so many ways. It can provide a huge range of fun experiences, make you feel good, improve your health, and is a great way to relax and enjoy the company of your friends.

Some of the benefits of being active include:

- It's a great way to have fun with friends and make new ones.
- It's an opportunity for new skills and challenges.
- It can boost your confidence.
- It can improve your fitness.
- It can make your bones and muscles stronger.
- It can improve your posture.
- It can help you maintain a healthy weight.
- It improves the health of your heart.
- It can help you relax.
- It reduces stress.
- It can help you maintain healthy growth and development.

How much?

You need to do at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day. But don't stress, you can build this up throughout the day with a variety of activities. And remember, you can always do more if you want to!

What about TV and computer games?

Watching TV, videos or DVDs, surfing the net and playing computer games can occupy a lot of your spare time. And while these may be fun, they usually involve sitting still for long periods. Research has shown that watching TV for more than two hours a day when you are young is associated with being overweight, having poor fitness, smoking and raised cholesterol in adulthood. So try to limit the amount of time you spend watching TV, videos or DVDs, surfing the net or playing computer games during your leisure time (homework doesn't count, sorry...), especially during the day, and on weekends, when you could be out doing something fun and active!



What if I'm not very active?

If you are not currently doing much physical activity, try and build up to 30 minutes a day with moderate activity such as walking or bike riding. Then steadily increase the time spent being active until you reach the goal of one hour or more each day.

Here are some ideas for getting active

- Choose a range of activities you like or think you might like to try.
- Be active with your friends. You are more likely to keep active if it's fun and you have people to enjoy it with.
- Walk more: to school, to visit friends, to shops, or other places in your neighbourhood.
- Try to limit time spent watching TV, videos or DVDs, surfing the net or playing computer games, especially during the day and on weekends.
- Take your dog or a neighbour's dog for a walk.
- Try new challenges – skate, ride, surf, cycle or snorkel.
- Be active with family members – in the yard and on family outings.
- Encourage and support younger brothers and sisters to be active.
- Try a new sport or go back to one you have played before.
- Take a class to learn a new skill such as yoga, kick boxing, dancing or diving.
- Check out the activities at your local recreation centre, club or youth centre.
- Put on some music and dance.

And remember to always take precautions to avoid injury.

How hard?

It's not hard! Your physical activity should be done at a moderate to vigorous intensity. There are heaps of fun ways to do it.

- Moderate activities like brisk walking, bike riding with friends, skateboarding and dancing.
- Vigorous activities such as football, netball, soccer, running, swimming laps or training for sport.

Vigorous activities are those that make you "huff and puff". For additional health benefits, try to include 30 minutes or more of vigorous activity three to four days a week.



What is the best activity to do?

Any physical activity is good for you. Try to be active in as many ways as you can. Variety is important in providing a range of fun experiences and challenges and gives you an opportunity to learn new skills.

There are easy things you can do out of habit that will be good for you. For example, you can walk the dog and replace short trips with a walk or a bike ride.

Physical activity can be part of:

- games
- sports
- having fun with friends
- getting to places (walking, cycling and skateboarding)
- dancing
- school or family activities.

Get a boost by combining activity with healthy eating

Healthy eating goes hand-in-hand with being active. As a teenager, you are growing at a rapid rate. An eating pattern that contains a healthy variety of foods such as vegetables (including legumes e.g. peas, beans and lentils), fruit and cereals, and is low in fat, salt and sugar, will help you to be at your healthiest best.

A healthy diet will make sure you have the energy, strength and good health to try new active challenges. If you combine healthy eating and physical activity, it will also help you maintain a healthy weight.

For more information

www.healthactive.gov.au
Other resources that you may find useful include:
Everyone wants to be more active. The problem is getting started. National Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults
Food for Health, Australian Dietary Guidelines for Adults, Children and Adolescents
Australian Guide to Healthy Eating
Each of these can be obtained by calling 1800 000 103 and asking for the PHD publications request line.

GET HEALTHY. GET ACTIVE.

Building a healthy, active Australia.



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Department of Health and Ageing (DHA), Australia's Physical Activity Recommendations for 12-18 year olds, Canberra.

	N	Child believes they are sufficiently active for good general health	Parents believe children are sufficiently active for good general health	Parent Awareness of Guidelines		
				Aware	Unaware	Not sure
Sufficiently Active	45 (43.3%)	42 (93.3%)	41 (91.1%)	11 (24.4%)	24 (53.3%)	10 (22.2%)
Insufficiently Active	59 (56.7%)	41 (69.5%)	44 (74.6%)	11 (18.6%)	31 (52.5%)	17 (28.8%)