



Promote Health and Fitness: Increase Physical Activity

Regular physical activity for children and adolescents can enhance health by reducing the risk factors for chronic disease. National data indicates that 30 percent of youth in the United States ages 6-19 are either overweight or at risk of becoming overweight. The number of overweight children has tripled in the past thirty 30 years.

2001 North Dakota High School Data (Self-Reported)

(<http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/health/region912.pdf>)

- About 40 percent report not getting a sufficient amount of vigorous physical activity. (Vigorous activity was defined as sweating and breathing hard for 20 minutes or longer on 3 or more of the 7 days preceding the survey.)
- About 74 percent report not getting sufficient moderate activity. (Moderate activity was defined as activity which did not cause sweating or breathing hard for 30 minutes or longer per day for 5 out of 7 days preceding the survey.)
- About 48 percent report being enrolled in a physical education class. Only about 32 percent attend a physical education class on a daily basis.
- About 26 percent report watching 3 three or more hours of television per day.

What can parents do to increase the physical activity of youth?

- **Limit screen time.** Studies indicate that children who spend more screen time have a higher body mass index, an indicator of body fat, compared to

those with lower viewing time. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that parents limit viewing time for youth to two hours or less per day. Have your children keep a log of time spent in front of the screen and then make decisions together about screen time and alternative activities.

- **Create a list of alternative activities for your children.** Provide opportunities for children to become involved in creative play and craft activities. Develop skills useful in adult life such as cooking or gardening. Extension 4-H project books would provide an excellent resource. (<http://www.bam.gov>)
- **Parents need to serve as a role model and be physically active.** Children learn by example as well as by verbal direction. Learn and practice physical activity skills that can be used throughout life such as walking, biking, running, swimming and hiking. Doing activities together, including household chores, helps build cohesive family units. (<http://www.fitness.gov/funfit/10tips.htm>)
- **Parents can advocate for daily physical activity in their children's schools.** Physical education needs to focus on development of skills for pursuits available throughout one's life and not just team sports. Obtain information from the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (<http://www.aahperd.org>), a nonprofit organization of professionals involved in fitness and physical activity fields.
- **Parents can help their community to develop outdoor and indoor recreation facilities and programs.** Some communities have advocated for and found public funds or grant money to build bike and walking paths. Parents can support the development of classes and intramural sports events available after school and in the summer. Parents can volunteer to assist with various recreational activities at school and in the community. (<http://www.cdc.gov/verb>)

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For more information on this and other topics, see: www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu

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MAY 2003