

Physical Activity and the Health of Young People

Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH), National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (NCCDPHP), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Benefits of Regular Physical Activity

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

Long-Term Consequences of Physical Inactivity

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

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 18.8% in 2004.^{3,4}
- Children and adolescents who are overweight are more likely to be overweight or obese as adults;^{5,6,7} overweight adults are at increased risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, some types of cancer, and gallbladder disease.⁸

Participation in Physical Activity by Young People

- During the 7 days preceding the survey, 77% of children aged 9-13 years reported participating in free-time physical activity.⁹
- Thirty-six percent of high school students had participated in at least 60 minutes per day of physical activity on 5 or more of the 7 days preceding the survey.¹⁰
- Sixty-four percent of high school students participated in sufficient vigorous physical activity, and 27% participated in sufficient moderate physical activity.¹⁰
- Participation in physical activity declines as children get older.¹

Percentage of High School Students Participating in Physical Activity and Physical Education, by Sex, 2005¹⁰

	Girls	Boys
At least 60 minutes/day of physical activity ^a	27.8%	43.8%
Attended physical education class daily ^b	29.0%	37.1%

^aAny kind of physical activity that increased heart rate and made them breathe hard some of the time for at least 60 minutes per day on 5 or more of the 7 days preceding the survey

^bAttended physical education classes 5 days in an average week when they were in school



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Participation in Physical Education Classes

- Over half (54%) of high school students (72% of 9th grade students but only 39% of 12th grade students) attended physical education classes in 2005.¹⁰
- 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 2005 (33%). In 2005, 45% of 9th grade students but only 22% of 12th grade students attended physical education class daily.¹⁰
- Among the 54% of students who attended physical education classes, 84% actually exercised or played sports for 20 minutes or longer during an average class.¹⁰

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For Additional Information Contact:

DASH, NCCDPHP, CDC
4770 Buford Highway, NE (Mail Stop K-12), Atlanta, GA 30341-3717
800-CDC-INFO
E-mail: CDC-INFO@cdc.gov