

# Physical Activity Facts

- Regular physical activity in childhood and adolescence improves strength and endurance, helps build healthy bones and muscles, helps control weight, reduces anxiety and stress, increases self-esteem, and may improve blood pressure and cholesterol levels.<sup>1</sup>
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that young people aged 6–17 years participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity daily.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2011, 29% of high school students surveyed had participated in at least 60 minutes per day of physical activity on all 7 days before the survey, and only 31% attended physical education class daily.<sup>3</sup>
- Schools can promote physical activity through comprehensive school physical activity programs, including recess, classroom-based physical activity, intramural physical activity clubs, interscholastic sports, and physical education.
- Schools should ensure that physical education is provided to all students in all grades and is taught by qualified teachers.
- Schools can also work with community organizations to provide out-of-school-time physical activity programs and share physical activity facilities.

## Physical Activity and the Health of Young People

### Benefits of Regular Physical Activity

Regular physical activity—

- Helps build and maintain healthy bones and muscles.<sup>1</sup>
- Helps reduce the risk of developing obesity and chronic diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and colon cancer.<sup>1</sup>
- Reduces feelings of depression and anxiety and promotes psychological well-being.<sup>1</sup>
- May help improve students' academic performance, including
  - Academic achievement and grades
  - Academic behavior, such as time on task
  - Factors that influence academic achievement, such as concentration and attentiveness in the classroom.<sup>4</sup>

### Long-Term Consequences of Physical Inactivity

- Overweight and [obesity](#), which are influenced by physical inactivity and poor diet, can increase one's risk for diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, asthma, arthritis, and poor health status.<sup>5-7</sup>
- Physical inactivity increases one's risk for dying prematurely, dying of heart disease, and developing diabetes, colon cancer, and high blood pressure.<sup>1</sup>

### Participation in Physical Activity by Young People

- In a nationally representative survey, 77% of children aged 9–13 years reported participating in free-time physical activity during the previous 7 days.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2011, only 29% percent of high school students had participated in at least 60 minutes per day of physical activity on each of the 7 days before the survey.<sup>3</sup>
- Fourteen percent of high school students had not participated in 60 or more minutes of any kind of physical activity on *any* day during the 7 days before the survey.<sup>3</sup>
- Participation in physical activity declines as young people age.<sup>3</sup>

## Percentage of High School Students Participating in Physical Activity and Physical Education, by Sex, 2011<sup>3</sup>

Type of Activity	Females	Males
<b>At least 60 minutes/day of physical activity<sup>a</sup></b>	18.5%	38.3%
<b>Attended physical education class daily<sup>b</sup></b>	27.2%	34.6%

<sup>a</sup>Any 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 each of the 7 days before the survey.

<sup>b</sup> Attended physical education classes 5 days in an average week when they were in school.

### Participation in Physical Education Classes

- In 2011, over half (52%) of high school students (68% of 9th-grade students but only 38% of 12th-grade students) attended physical education classes in an average week.<sup>3</sup>
- The percentage of high school students who attended physical education classes daily decreased from 42% in 1991 to 25% in 1995 and remained stable at that level until 2011 (31%).<sup>3</sup>
- In 2011, 41% of 9th-grade students but only 24% of 12th-grade students attended physical education class daily.<sup>3</sup>

### Key Resources

- [Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs: A Guide for Schools](#)
- [School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity](#)
- [Physical Education Curriculum Analysis Tool](#)
- [Youth Physical Activity Guidelines Toolkit](#)
- [The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, Physical Education, and Academic Performance](#)  [pdf 2.5] (Full report) [Executive Summary](#)  [pdf 309K]

### References

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5. Daniels S, Arnett D, Eckel R, et al. Overweight in children and adolescents: pathophysiology, consequences, prevention, and treatment. *Circulation* 2005;111:1999–2012.
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