

The Research File



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Parental Influence on Children's Physical Activity



Low rates of physical activity among young children and youth is of concern given the importance of physical activity for children's healthy growth

and development and since physical activity behaviors have been shown to track throughout childhood into adulthood. Moreover, regular physical activity has been shown to mitigate the risk of developing various disorders such as; type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and obesity.¹ Participation in

physical activity in groups has also been shown to exert social benefits.² Many psychosocial and environmental factors have been shown to affect children's physical activity levels.^{2,3} Parents may be an important means for encouraging children to be more physical activity as they are usually



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the primary decision makers for their children's daily schedules and are responsible for guiding issues such as time spent in sedentary activities.² But just how do parents influence children's activity and to what extent? Recently, increasing attention has been focused on identifying which parental behaviors (for example role modeling, support, and encouragement) promote physical activity in children.

Factors associated with children's daily PA

Zecevic and colleagues conducted a study which aimed at identifying parent and child characteristics that may be associated with children's participation in physical activity.² With respect to child characteristics, watching less than an hour of TV/videos per day was a significant predictor of whether children achieved the recommended amount of daily activity (children who watched less TV are 4.7 times more likely to participate in sufficient PA²). In addition they found a slight association (though not significant) between children's age and gender and their level of participation. Specifically, male children were almost 3 times more likely to meet recommended levels of activity compared to girls and children were slightly less likely to be active for at least an hour a day with each month increase in age.² Zecevic et al also noted parental physical activity characteristics that were associated



What have we learned?

- Rates of physical activity among children and youth remain below recommended levels.
- Time spent in sedentary activity, gender and age are associated with the amount of time children spend in active pursuits.
- Parental enjoyment is the strongest predictor of children's physical activity.
- Parental support and their own activity behaviors also contribute to the amount of activity children engage in.
- Parental strategies for encouraging participation in physical activities appear to differ based on SES.
- Greater parental support and activity is associated with greater intensity of physical activity among children.

with children's participation. According to the authors parental enjoyment of physical activity was significantly associated with children's participation (i.e.: the greater the parent's enjoyment of PA the more likely children were to meet recommended levels²). A slight association between parental support (which involves encouragement and involvement), parental physical activity behaviors and children's physical activity was also noted. Specifically, children were more likely to achieve recommended levels of activity with increasing parental support and activity.²

In another study by Brockman et al, strategies employed by parents to encourage children to participate differed based on the SES (socio-economic status) of the schools.³ Children from middle/high SES schools were more likely to report that they were encouraged by their families to take part in physical activity through non-verbal methods (e.g., logistical, financial support, modeling, co-participation) whereas those from low SES schools were more likely to receive verbal encouragement and prompts.³ Overall, children from more affluent schools were more likely than those from lower SES schools to report participating in family-based activity.³ Brockman and colleagues also asked parents to report on perceived barriers of participating in family-based activity. Lack of time was the most commonly reported barrier among parents across all SES groups; whereas cost was cited among parents of children from low SES schools.³

Factors associated with intensity of children's PA

Zecevic et al also examined child and parental factors that may be associated with parent's perceived intensity of a child's physical activity.² The authors noted that child and parental age were significantly associated with a child's physical activity intensity level (i.e.: older children and children of older parents were slightly less likely to be highly active compared to younger children or children of younger parents).² The authors also found that parental support and parental physical activity significantly predicted children's degree of activity throughout the day. For example children whose parents provided greater support for physical activity were more than 4 times more likely to be throughout the day.²

More info...

- ¹ Janssen I., LeBlanc A. (2010). Systematic review of the health benefits of physical activity and fitness in school-aged children and youth. *International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity*. Vol. 7:40.
- ² Zecevic et al. (2010). *Parental Influence on Young Children's Physical Activity*. Hindawi Publishing Corporation.
- ³ Brockman et al. (2009). "Get off the sofa and go play": Family and socioeconomic influences on the physical activity of 10-11 year old children. *BMC Public Health*.