

KEEPING KIDS *physically active every day*

A physically active lifestyle is one in which various forms of physical activity are valued and incorporated into a person's daily routine. Physical activity can consist of sports or recreational pursuits, practical activities and active modes of transportation.

Even a small amount of activity can be good for a sedentary young person, although it is recommended that youth get at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) per day. The health benefits increase significantly beyond the 60-minute mark, but what is important is **that young people engage in "as much physical activity as possible."**

In recent decades, societal changes have put a lot of pressure on our way of life. The technological boom, urbanization, transformation of the traditional family and workplace, shift from active modes of transportation (walking, biking) to motorized transportation (cars, mopeds), and the sedentary nature of several leisure pursuits have led to reduced levels of physical activity among youth.

Studies show that approximately **50% of girls** and **25% of boys** aged 6 to 11 years **get less than 60 minutes of physical activity per day**. The situation worsens during adolescence, with the percentages rising to **65% for girls** and **47% for boys**.

WHY TAKE ACTION?

Because physical activity is essential for young people's healthy development

Physical activity has a positive effect on physical health, psychological well-being, mental health, social skills, cognitive ability and academic success.

Because the current context does not promote a physically active lifestyle

Often, activities, equipment and facilities are not available in certain settings (e.g., rural, low-income) or for certain clientele (e.g., very young children, girls, cultural communities). In some young people's living environments (e.g., schools, daycare centres), physical activities have been replaced by less vigorous or even sedentary pursuits. Sometimes, activities are not **accessible**, because of factors such as cost, schedule, location, transportation or even communications. In other cases, activities do not cater to young people's interests.

MANY FACTORS INFLUENCE YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

Urban planning, shared use of equipment and facilities, safety and accessibility are issues that need to be addressed in certain communities. In addition, **appropriate supervision and conditions** must be put in place to ensure that young people have a positive experience they will want to repeat over and over. **Facilitators** play a crucial role in the quality of young people's experiences and the benefits they can derive from them. Year after year, many organizations have to cope with a lack of facilitators and volunteers, and a high staff turnover, which disrupts training and supervision. Finally, **positive messages and approval** from facilitators, **family and friends** will have a strong influence on young people's desire to be active and, subsequently, on their physical activity levels.

HOW TO CHANGE THE SITUATION?

It is important to make changes in environments where youth spend most of their time in order to help them adopt and, especially, maintain a physically active lifestyle.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS

DAYCARES AND CHILDCARE SETTINGS

- Incorporate physical activity into regular schedules and programs, giving children an opportunity to explore a variety of motor skills in different contexts.
- Provide facilitators with training so they can offer kids better and more opportunities to be active.
- Get parents involved so they can encourage their children to continue their activities at home.
- Offer activities that are appealing to both girls and boys, and avoid gender stereotypes.

SCHOOLS AND AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

- Involve young people in planning and leading certain activities (e.g., "Mentore Active," "Ma cour : un monde de plaisir!").
- Through awareness programs targeting youth, parents and staff, offer alternatives to short car trips to school (e.g., "On the move to school!," walking school bus, Trottibus, etc.).
- Based on existing initiatives, develop activities to promote and raise awareness about physical activity. Get young people involved in organizing these activities.
- Incorporate physical activity into regular schedules and programs, giving children an opportunity to explore a variety of motor skills in different contexts.
- Set up an area in the schoolyard where children can engage in active play.
- Get parents involved so they can encourage their children to continue their activities at home.
- Offer activities that are appealing to both girls and boys, and avoid gender stereotypes.

COMMUNITY GROUPS AND ASSOCIATIONS

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MUNICIPALITIES

- Plan neighbourhoods so that parks, playing areas, sports and outdoor facilities, and bike paths are easily accessible.
- Create safe, user-friendly and efficient bicycle and pedestrian paths.
- Establish agreements among organizations to maximize use of available facilities and equipment in the community.
- Particularly in low-income areas, promote physical and financial access to the activities of community groups and associations through accessibility policies for youth and families, and support measures for sports and community organizations, etc.

Given the importance of a physically active lifestyle in young people's healthy development, the fact that a growing number of youth do not get enough physical activity is an issue that concerns our society as a whole. Current living environments do not make the "healthy choice" the easiest choice for young people. This is a collective issue that requires a collective response. Every gesture counts and can make a difference.

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