

Are Your Children Active Enough?

Parents often wonder if their children are committing enough time and energy to their schoolwork. If academic performance is important in your family, do you give the same consideration to the amount of physical activity your child gets on a regular basis?

Recent studies show that an active lifestyle can actually help young people improve their study habits. Research suggests that after children engage in physical activity, mental focus and concentration levels improve significantly.

But being physically active isn't just about helping kids improve their study habits. The emphasis on physical fitness comes at a time when childhood obesity is unfortunately on the rise, and the health risks to children can be devastating.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the caloric intake of children has remained relatively stable over the years, while children's physical activity has declined 13%. We can see the effects of this trend in many places: the increasing number of children with Type II Diabetes, once considered an adult condition, is directly linked to childhood obesity. Long-term effects from childhood obesity can include metabolic syndrome, hypertension, high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, and even some cancers.

The good news is that numerous health concerns can be avoided through a healthy and active lifestyle. How can you determine if your kids are active enough? Consider these suggestions:

- Encourage your kids to keep a journal of their daily activities so you are aware of their exercise.
- Lead by example: plan a family fitness activity.
- Encourage children to put down the remote controls and participate in outdoor activities.
- Help your children identify a lifelong sport they can master, such as swimming or hiking.
- Suggest kids form an exercise pact with a school buddy.

In addition to what parents can do at home to help their kids, communities must demand quality physical activity and expanded nutrition education in all schools. According to the CDC, the percentage of students who took physical education on a daily basis dropped from 42 percent to 29 percent between 1991 and 1999. The most effective solutions are those that are community-based and provide proactive ways to help our children. Childhood obesity is much easier to prevent than treat, and by working together we can give our children a greater chance to be healthy. Success requires more than just hitting the books, it requires leading a balanced and active life.

The Coalition for a Healthy and Active America (CHAA) is a national grassroots organization which brings together parents, communities, and schools to craft

responsible solutions to the problem of childhood obesity. CHAA believes the most crucial step in fighting obesity is a rededication to physical fitness and nutrition education. CHAA promotes a balanced approach of daily physical activity and proper nutrition education in our communities and schools. CHAA coalitions have already formed in more than a dozen states across the country. For more information on how you can get involved, please visit www.chaausa.org.