
Maine in Motion

The Case for Increased Physical Activity

We see it on the news, hear about it on the radio, and read about it in the papers -- the United States is becoming a country filled with overweight and obese people. Overweight and obesity and their associated health problems have substantial economic consequences for the U.S. health care system. In 2002, over half of Maine adults were considered overweight or obese, the highest rank in New England. Obesity among Maine adults has increased by 50% in the past decade, while the national rate for overweight among youth has more than double in the past 20 years.

Overweight and obesity can be prevented -- and physical activity can play a substantial role in bringing this epidemic under control.

And what better place to start than with our children. Children can learn that physical activity can be a lifelong habit that is both fun and rewarding. Physical activity has been identified as one of our nation's leading health indicators in "Healthy People 2010," the national objectives for the decade. Enhancing efforts to promote participation in physical activity and sports among young people is a critical priority.

The benefits of regular physical activity include:

- ★ building strong bones and strengthening muscles
- ★ maintaining flexibility
- ★ achieving a healthy weight
- ★ promoting good posture and balance
- ★ improving fitness
- ★ strengthening the heart
- ★ improving self-esteem
- ★ increasing relaxation
- ★ enhancing healthy growth and development.

Intense physical activity programs have positive effects on academic achievement, including increased concentration; improved mathematics, reading, and writing test scores; and reduced disruptive behavior. ***Academic achievement improves even when physical education reduces the time spent on academics.***

Participation in physical activity and sports can promote social well-being, as well as physical and mental health, among young people. Research has shown that students who participate in interscholastic sports are less likely to be regular and heavy smokers or use drugs, are more likely to stay in school, have good conduct and high academic achievement.

“Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General” is an overview of research related to physical activity and health. The report summarizes the benefits of physical activity including reinforcing the importance of promoting physical activity. Since many children and adolescents are at risk for health problems because of inactive lifestyles, the report emphasizes that everyone should participate in a moderate amount of physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week.

References:

“Fact Sheet: Nutrition, Physical Activity and Achievement,” Action for Healthy Kids (downloaded July 2003) - www.ActionForHealthyKids.org.

“Promoting Better Health for Young People Through Physical Activity and Sports -- A Report to the President from the Secretary of Health & Human Services & the Secretary of Education.” Fall 2000.

“Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General.” (1997) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Mail Stop K-46, 4770 Buford Highway NE, Atlanta, GA 30341-3717. <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/sgr/sgr.htm>.

“Healthy People 2010.” Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 200 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 738-G, Washington, DC 20201. www.healthypeople.gov/