



Canadian
Physiotherapy
Association

Association
canadienne de
physiothérapie

Position Statement

Physical Activity for Youth and Children

The Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) believes that regular exercise and an active and healthy lifestyle are essential for Canadian children to achieve and maintain health throughout the lifespan. The opportunity to exercise within one's ability should be available and accessible to all Canadians. Removing barriers to physical activity in our social, physical and cultural environments will promote healthy lifestyles for all children regardless of ability.

Physical activity and regular exercise are important components of a child's education as are language, math, or science. Exercise must be integrated into all aspects of children's lives - in the school, at home and in social environments.

Background

Fewer than half of Canadian children meet the recommended activity levels for optimal health and development.¹ Cut backs to physical education programs in schools, reductions in extracurricular athletics and inadequate standards governing appropriate levels of physical activity have all contributed to this growing problem. Evidence exists that children who are less physically active are at an increased risk for numerous health problems related to inactivity.^{1,2} Physical inactivity is the second most important risk factor for poor health in developed countries:

- It doubles the risk of developing cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, and obesity
- It increases the risk of cancer, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, depression and anxiety
- It contributes to the death of more than 2 million people per year³

Regular physical activity can prevent and reduce the impact of many chronic diseases.^{3,4,5} There is further evidence that regular exercise prevents and controls dangerous behaviours among youth, such as the abuse of tobacco, drugs or alcohol, unhealthy diets and violence.¹ Regular exercise enhances school performance and children who are active

¹ Canadian Pediatric Society. (2002). Healthy active living for children and youth. *Paediatrics and Child Health*, 7(5): 339-345.

² Lotan, M., Isakov, E., Kessel, S., Merrick, J. (2004). Physical fitness and functional ability of children with intellectual disability: effects of a short-term daily treadmill intervention. *Scientific World Journal*, (4): 449-457.

³ World Health Organization. Move for Health. [on-line]. Available: <http://www.who.int/moveforhealth/en/>. Retrieved April 19, 2006.

⁴ Risseanen, A., Fogelholm, M. (1999). Physical activity in the prevention of other morbid conditions and impairments associated with obesity: current evidence and research issues. *Med Sci Sports Exerc*, (31): S635-45.

⁵ Knowler, W.C., Barrett-Connor, E., Fowler, S.E., et al. (2002). Diabetes Prevention Program Research Group. Reduction in the incidence of type 2 diabetes with lifestyle intervention or metformin. *N Eng J Med*, (346): 393-403.

at an early age are likely to remain active throughout their lives.^{1,2,3} Exercise programs have also been shown to have a positive impact on the physical capacity of children with disabilities.^{6,7}

Physical activity should promote cardiovascular fitness, healthy bone growth and motor development/coordination. Appropriate exercise includes a variety of safe, formal and informal activities: school based physical-education classes, sports, recreation, transportation, household tasks, work, and planned exercise programs. Any increase in activity should be balanced with a proportional reduction in the amount of time spent on sedentary activities such as watching television.

A number of physical activity guidelines may be useful in promoting increased physical activity in children. For example, the Canadian Paediatric Society recommends that all children participate in at least 20 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity and 10 minutes of vigorous physical activity every day. Children who have reached this level of physical activity per day for a month may gradually increase the time and intensity of the activities until they are accumulating at least 90 minutes of physical activity every day.¹

Childhood is a critical period to instill health and wellness behaviours. By including physical activity as part of their daily lives, children and adolescents can substantially improve their physical health, mental health and quality of life. CPA endorses the role of physiotherapists as essential partners in the promotion of health and the prevention of chronic disease in Canadian children.

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⁶Fragala-Pinkham, M.A., Haley, S.M., Rabin, J., Kharasch, V.S. (2005). A fitness program for children with disabilities. *PhysTher*, (85): 1182-1200.

⁷ Eagleton, M., Iams, A., McDowal, J., Morrison, R., Evans, C.L. (2004). The effects of strength training on gait in adolescents with cerebral palsy. *Pediatr Physiotherapy*, (16): 22-30.