A Report of the Surgeon General

Physical Activity and Health

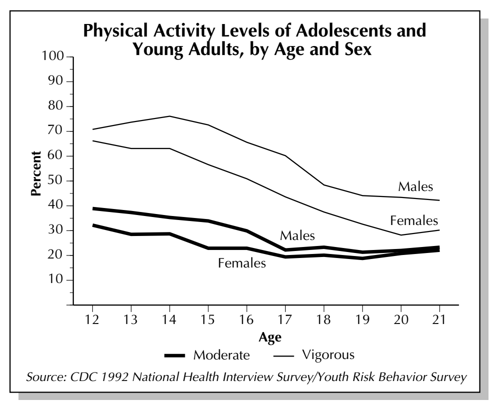
Adolescents and Young Adults

Key Messages

- Adolescents and young adults, both male and female, benefit from physical activity.
- Physical activity need not be strenuous to be beneficial.
- Moderate amounts of daily physical activity are recommended for people of all ages. This amount can be obtained in longer sessions of moderately intense activities, such as brisk walking for 30 minutes, or in shorter sessions of more intense activities, such as jogging or playing basketball for 15–20 minutes.
- Greater amounts of physical activity are even more beneficial, up to a point. Excessive amounts of physical activity can lead to injuries, menstrual abnormalities, and bone weakening.

Facts

- Nearly half of American youths aged 12–21 years are not vigorously active on a regular basis.
- About 14 percent of young people report no recent physical activity. Inactivity is more common among females (14%) than males (7%) and among black females (21%) than white females (12%).
- Participation in all types of physical activity declines strikingly as age or grade in school increases.
- Only 19 percent of all high school students are physically active for 20 minutes or more, five days a week, in physical education classes.



- Daily enrollment in physical education classes dropped from 42 percent to 25 percent among high school students between 1991 and 1995.
- Well designed school-based interventions directed at increasing physical activity in physical education classes have been shown to be effective.
- Social support from family and friends has been consistently and positively related to regular physical activity.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports

The Nation's Prevention Agency
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Benefits of Physical Activity

- Helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints.
- Helps control weight, build lean muscle, and reduce fat.
- Prevents or delays the development of high blood pressure and helps reduce blood pressure in some adolescents with hypertension.

What Communities Can Do

- Provide quality, preferably daily, K–12 physical education classes and hire physical education specialists to teach them.
- Create opportunities for physical activities that are enjoyable, that promote adolescents' and young adults' confidence in their ability to be physically active, and that involve friends, peers, and parents.
- Provide appropriate physically active role models for youths.
- Provide access to school buildings and community facilities that enable safe participation in physical activity.
- Provide a range of extracurricular programs in schools and community recreation centers to meet the needs and interests of specific adolescent and young adult populations, such as racial and ethnic minority groups, females, persons with disabilities, and low-income groups.
- Encourage health care providers to talk routinely to adolescents and young adults about the importance of incorporating physical activity into their lives.

For more information contact:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity, MS K-46
4770 Buford Highway, NE
Atlanta, GA 30341-3724
1-888-CDC-4NRG or 1-888-232-4674 (Toll Free)
http://www.cdc.gov

The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports
Box SG
Suite 250
701 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004