

Get Up Off Of That Thing!

Modern kids have been de-programmed from physical activity. They take the bus or are chauffeured to school, sit at their desks and in the cafeteria, and take the bus or are chauffeured home, where they sit in front of the television, computer or video game. Between home and school, fewer than 1 in 4 children are getting 30 minutes of *any* physical activity per day, and fewer than 1 in 4 children are getting even 20 minutes of vigorous activity per *week*.

Physical activity has become voluntary for most of us. More and more, we're passing our days inside, isolated from nature, and from each other. Literally unable to see the trees through the concrete urban forest, our isolation from nature and humanity has led to boredom and depression - a perfect combination for overeating and inactivity. Not only do a growing number of kids have attention deficit disorder, they also have *nature* deficit disorder.

We've become a population good at sitting still. We've created communities downright hostile to physical activity. Modern community design conspires to deny our children the opportunity to fulfill their need to *move*. Children living in urban cores find their opportunities for physical activity restricted by heavy street traffic, neglected and deteriorating recreation facilities, and fear of street crime. Children living in suburbia live in neighborhoods often designed excluding playgrounds and green spaces. Residential areas are often separated by considerable distance, and by multi-lane roads, from accessible outdoor activities.

Schools are not helping, to no fault of their own. More and more suburban schools are being built far from the core of the neighborhoods they serve. Only 10-15 percent of children walk or bike to school, down from two-thirds thirty years ago. Budgetary constraints have forced many schools to severely limit physical education, in many cases to once *weekly*. Some schools have even made the decision to hold recess indoors out of liability concerns, as American parents have become more likely to sue over injuries sustained on the playground.

Increasing Opportunities For Physical Activity

- Reverse the decades-long trend in poor community planning that conspires against physical activity. Create attractive sidewalks, walking trails, and hiking/biking paths between parks and green spaces, and along rivers. Assure safety with adequate lighting. Assure frequent and safe pedestrian and bicycle crossings on neighborhood streets. Design public transit stops to safely connect pedestrians, bicyclists, and people with disabilities to surrounding sidewalks and bike lanes.
- Increase community funding support for parks and recreation facilities, and physical activity programs
- When buying a new home, give consideration to its accessibility to safe outdoor recreational opportunities for kids. Realtors and developers will take notice.
- Limit screen time to less than 2 hours a day for everyone
- Develop physical activity routines that can be enjoyed by the entire family, such as walking, biking, swimming, or martial arts.
- Ensure that children get at least 60 minutes of some physical activity on most or all days of the week
- Get a dog, and walk it at least 30 minutes each day

- Encourage children's participation in developmentally appropriate organized competitive or non-competitive (eg. dance, ballet, swimming, martial arts, gymnastics) activities
- Buy a step counter (pedometer). Build up to a goal of 5000 steps per day for kids, 10000 steps per day for adults
- Lobby for schools to provide "PE every day for every child". Physical education should emphasize personal fitness rather than team sports
- Lobby for safe walking or bicycling to school through the creation of sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike paths with proper lighting and crossing guards during school hours
- Lobby for adequate funding of after-school and vacation programs that emphasize physical activity

Did You Know?

Students achieve best when physically fit. Hundreds of studies have shown the greatest gains in academic achievement occur when students meet minimum fitness levels.

Our society has forgotten the connection between healthy bodies and healthy minds. Physical activity not only improves academic performance, but also mental health and self-esteem.

Yet schools are flunking PE. At the same time children are eating more junk foods at school, they're getting fewer opportunities to burn off the additional calories.

Only 6-8% of American children are in daily physical education classes. Even when they are, often they're just standing around: the average child is aerobically active for only about 4 minutes during an average PE class.