



National Association for Sport & Physical Education

An Association of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance

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ADULTS/TEENS ATTITUDES TOWARD PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

A Survey Conducted by Opinion Research Corporation International of Princeton, NJ, for the National Association for Sport and Physical Education

Introduction

Recent studies by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show the number of overweight children has more than doubled in the last three decades, 5.3 million, or 12.5 percent, of Americans between 6 and 17 are overweight or obese. The CDC estimates sick care costs associated with obesity such as diabetes and heart disease at \$100 billion a year, about 8 percent of the national health care budget.

The lack of physical activity among Americans of all ages is so critical, it is considered to be a major health risk factor. Recently *The New England Journal of Medicine* reported that girls become so sluggish in their teenage years that many barely move at all. Black girls were even more sedentary than whites, and this sets the stage for a lifetime of obesity and associated chronic illnesses like high blood pressure and diabetes.

The Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health (1996) reports that Americans become increasingly less active with each year of age. Research links inactivity among children to sedentary living among adults. Inactivity and poor diet cause at least 300,000 deaths a year in the United States. This is more than by infectious disease, firearms, motor vehicles and illicit drug use, combined! Physical activity or more directly inactivity is a risk factor for many diseases including stroke, heart disease, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, various cancers, diabetes, depression, obesity and more.

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), a nonprofit education association of over 18,000 professionals in the fitness and physical activity fields, wanted to explore with adults and teens their attitudes about physical activity and physical education: to learn about their physical activity experiences, positive and negative. Here are highlights of their beliefs. NASPE, an association of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD), is the only national association dedicated to strengthening basic knowledge about sport and physical activity among professionals and the general public. Putting that knowledge into action in schools and communities across the nation is critical to improved academic performance, social reform and the health of individuals.

Major Findings

Adult Physical Activity

Getting Enough Physical Activity to Maintain A Healthy Lifestyle

- ◆ The majority of adults (59%) feel that they are getting enough physical activity to maintain a healthy lifestyle.
 - Men are more likely than women to feel they are getting enough physical activity to maintain a healthy lifestyle (65% vs. 53%).
 - Adults outside metropolitan areas (65%) are more apt to believe they are getting enough daily physical activity versus adults who live in metropolitan areas (57%).

Things Which Prevent Adults From Getting Enough Physical Activity

- ◆ Those who don't think they're getting enough physical activity primarily say it's because of their job (23%), not having enough time (18%), health problems (12%), or lack of interest or motivation (12%).

Frequency of Physical Activity

- ◆ Nearly nine in ten (88%) of American adults report getting at least some exercise for a period of at least 30 minutes per week, with an average of 3.9 times a week.
 - Men are more likely than women to get at least some weekly exercise (91% vs. 84%).
 - Adults under 55 are more likely than their older counterparts to report having at least some weekly exercise (nearly 90% for under 55 vs. 82% for those 55 and older).

Importance of Physical Activity

- ◆ Most adults (73%), state that health is the reason that physical activity is important. A number of adults also mention weight (16%); attitude (10%); and appearance (9%) as additional important reasons.
 - Females are significantly more likely to mention health (77%) and weight (19%), as their top reasons that physical activity is important, when compared to males (68% and 13%, respectively).

Improving Job Performance

- ◆ Almost nine-in-ten adults (88%) of all adults feel that being physically fit will help them improve their job performance.
 - Adults between aged 35-54 (91%) feel their job performance is positively affected by being fit more so than those aged 18-34 (86%).
 - The adults who currently have children in their household are significantly more likely to believe that their job performance improves with physical fitness when compared to those adults without children (93% vs. 85%).

- Of those who believe that job performance improves with being physically fit, 93% select “gives you more energy” as a reason, 85% choose “gives you greater mental alertness”, 83% say “reduces stress”, and 60% say being physically fit “allows better time management.”
 - Women are much more likely than men to reason that being physically fit reduces stress (86% vs. 76%) and allows better time management (65% vs. 55%) in their jobs.

Television Viewing/Personal Computer Usage

- ◆ On average, American adults watch 2.2 hours of television per day. Women (2.4 hrs. per day) are significantly more likely to average more time in front of the television than men (2.0 hours per day).
 - Adults aged 55 and over (15%) are more likely to watch 5 or more hours per day when compared to those ages 35-54 (7%) and 18-34 (8%).
- ◆ Overall, adults are spending almost two hours a day (1.7) using a personal computer for Internet browsing, chat rooms, games, and school research.

Child’s Physical Activity

Child Getting Enough Physical Activity to Maintain A Healthy Lifestyle

- ◆ Three-quarters (76%) of adults with children in the household (aged 6-17) feel that their children are getting enough daily physical activity maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Physical Education Classes in School

- ◆ Adults perceive that their children receive 3.4 days of Physical Education per school week.

Understanding of Child’s Physical Education Curriculum

- ◆ About three-quarters (74%) of adults with children in the household (aged 6-17) feel that they have a good understanding of they physical education curriculum at their child’s school.

Perception of Child's Physical Education Class Experience

- ◆ The majority of adults (84%) with children ages 6-17, have a positive perception about their child's physical education classes.

Physical Education Class and Child's Academic Needs

- ◆ Nearly three-fourths (73%) of American adults who have children in the household aged 6-17 believe that physical education will assist the development of learning capabilities in other subject areas, such as math, reading, or science.
 - Females are more likely than males (80% vs. 65%) to believe physical education assists in their child's development in other subjects in school.
 - Households with income less than \$25K are more likely to agree (85%) when compared to those households with income \$25K and over (72%), that physical education aids in learning development in other school subjects.
 - Adults in the North Central region are most likely to agree (82%) that their child's physical education contributes to the development of other learning capabilities.
 - Some reasons given for why parents believe that physical education will assist their child's development in other school subjects are: Makes child more alert/aware (26%); Child can focus/concentrate better (14%); Gives/increase energy (9%); Child learns how to work with others (6%); Reduces stress (6%); Math is involved in sports (6%), Child will be more healthy (5%); and Gives child a break/Child needs to move around (5%).
 - A much higher percentage of adults 55+ feel that their child's participation in physical education improves mental function overall (71%), when compared to adults 35-54 and 18-34 (54% and 51%, respectively).
 - Adults who reside in larger households (3 or more) are more likely to state that a child's participation in physical education improves mental function overall (55%) when compared to those who live alone with a child (40%).
 - Adults with some college education are more likely to mention makes the child healthier and gives/increases energy (13% and 12%) when compared to those with no college education (5% and 5%). A comparison can be made with these reasons when looking at those adults who have a household income of \$50K or more (13% and 18%) as compared to those with household incomes of \$25K but less than \$50K (9% and 2%) and less than \$25K (9% and 0%).

Daily Physical Activity of Child

- ◆ These Americans with children in the household between the ages of 6-17 report that their children spend an average of 2.5 hours daily doing physical activities after school.

Barriers Which Prevent Child From Being Physically Active

- ◆ The majority of parents feel that television (42%) and computers or video games (41%) are the largest barriers to their child's physical activity. Lack of interest or motivation (29%), too much homework (28%), and lack of access to safe facilities (21%) follow closely behind.

Encourage Physical Activity for Child

- ◆ Most parents encourage physical activity for their child all the time/frequently (72%) when compared to those parents who infrequently/never (7%) encourage physical activity.
 - Adults in the West (53%) region provide encouragement all the time to their children significantly more often than adult parents in the Northeast (30%) and North Central (28%) regions.

Sports/Physical Activity Participation Helps Self-Esteem

- ◆ The majority of parents (84%) with children aged 6-17 feel that participation in a sport or physical activity positively affects their child's self esteem.
 - A particularly high percentage of adults in the Northeast (94%) region feel their child's self-esteem is positively affected by a participation in sports or physical activity.

Sports and Physical Activity Minimizes Trouble for Child

- ◆ An overwhelming majority (85%) of all adults with children aged 6-17 believe that participation in sports or physical activities minimizes their child's ability to get into trouble.

Attitudes Towards Physical Activity and Physical Education

- ◆ Nearly eight in ten (79%) parents feel that their own attitudes towards physical activity will in turn affect their child's attitude towards physical activity.
 - Parents who are more affluent (household income of \$50K or more) are more likely to agree (86%) their attitudes affect their child's when it comes to physical activity than those parents (67%) in less affluent households (under \$25K).
- ◆ Nearly the same eight in ten (77%) parents feel that their attitudes towards physical education will in turn affect their child's attitude towards physical education.

Child's Non-Physical Activities

- ◆ Most parents feel their child spends the majority of their time in an average day watching television (2.2 hours) and/or reading or doing homework (1.9 hours). They feel a lesser amount of time is spent using a computer or on the Internet (1.4 hours), playing video games (1.2 hours), and talking on the phone (1.1 hours) per day.

Teens and Physical Activity

Getting Enough Physical Activity to Maintain A Healthy Lifestyle

- ◆ A large majority of teens ages 12-17 (84%) say that they are getting enough daily physical activity to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

- Younger teens (aged 12-14) are more likely than those ages 15-17 to say they get enough physical activity on a daily basis (88% vs. 81%).
- Male teens are more likely than females to say their daily physical activity is enough for them to maintain a healthy lifestyle (88% vs. 81%)

Participation in Physical Activity After School

- ◆ Slightly more than half (59%) of teens participate in an organized team or sports club after school. Teens in the Northeast (70%) are more likely to participate in an after school team or sports program versus teens in the South and West regions (56% and 49%, respectively).

Daily Physical Education in School

- ◆ An overwhelming majority of teens (92%) feel they should receive some type of daily physical education at school. Younger teens aged 12-14 feel more strongly about receiving some type of daily physical education at school, compared to teens ages 15-17 (96% vs. 87%)
 - Half (50%) of all teens say that they should have physical education classes five days a week at school. Conversely, only 3% of teens feel physical education should be only one day a week at school.
 - Northeast teens are much less likely to state that they should receive physical education five days a week relative to other geographic regions.

Physical Education Experience

- ◆ Over three-quarters of all teens (78%) would classify their physical education experience at school as Very good or Good.
 - Younger teens (aged 12-14) are more likely than those ages 15-17 to enjoy their physical education classes (85% vs. 71%).

Parents' Attitudes Towards Physical Activity

- ◆ Nearly six-in-ten (56%) of all teenagers would say that their parents' attitudes have no effect on their personal feelings towards Physical Activity.
 - Teenage boys are significantly more likely to agree that their parents' attitudes do not affect their attitudes towards Physical Activity when compared to teenage girls (63% vs. 48%).

Parents' Attitudes Towards Physical Education

- ◆ A majority (64%) of all teenagers also agree, that their parents' attitudes towards Physical Education have no effect on their own feelings.
 - Teenage boys are more likely (69%) than teenage girls (60%) to not share in their parents' attitudes when it comes to Physical Education.

Person Who Would Help You Be More Active

- ◆ When asked to name the person that would *best* help them be more active, a majority of teens selected: friends (56%), followed by parents (18%) and professional athletes (11%). Few felt that teachers (5%), their doctor (4%), or celebrities (3%) would help them to be more active.
 - Older teens more frequently cite friends as their *best* option to be more active (60%, compared to 51% for teens 12-14 years of age).

Sports and Physical Activity Helps You Stay Out of Trouble

- ◆ A large majority (85%) of all American teens are of the belief that their participation in sports or physical activity will help them stay out of trouble.
 - Those teens aged 12-14 are significantly more likely than older teens (aged 15-17) to say participation in sports or physical activity helps them stay out of trouble (92% vs. 78%).

Watching Television

- ◆ On average, teens say they watch 2.2 hours of television a day. Young teens (aged 12-14) say they watch significantly more television when compared to teens aged 15-17 (2.4 vs. 2.0).
 - Boys are more likely than girls to watch television for longer periods of time each day, on average 2.3 vs. 2.1 hours per day.
 - Teens located in the South and North Central regions on average watch significantly more hours of television per day (on average, 2.5 and 2.3, respectively) versus teenagers in the Northeast region (on average, 1.8)

Non-Physical Activities

- ◆ Most teens feel they spend the majority of their “downtime” in an average day on a personal computer (Internet browsing, chat rooms, games, or school research) (1.9 hours) and/or doing homework (1.9 hours). They feel the least amount of time is spent playing video games (1.0 hours) per day.

Adult vs. Teen Opinions on Physical Fitness and Health

Frequency of Physical Activity

- ◆ Adults with children in the household aged 6-17 report that their oldest child participates in physical activity for at least 30 minutes an average of 4.9 days per week. Teen’s ages 12-17 say that, on average, they participate in physical activity for at least 30 minutes and average 4.2 days per week.
 - Adults with children under 12 are more likely than those with children ages 12-17 to say their child participates in physical activity for at least 30 minutes more often in the past week, on average (5.5 vs. 4.9).

- Adults from North Central and West regions are more likely than those from the Northeast and South regions to report their children participated in 30 minutes of physical activity, on average, per week (5.4-North Central, 5.4-South vs. 5.1-Northeast, 5.0-South).

Getting Enough Physical Activity to Maintain A Healthy Lifestyle

- ◆ About three quarters of all adults (76%) with children in the household aged 6-17 believe that their children are getting enough daily physical activity to maintain a healthy lifestyle. While a slightly larger percentage of teens (84%) aged 12-17 feel that they are getting enough physical activity to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Frequency of Physical Education

- ◆ Adults with children in the household aged 6-17 report that their children should participate in physical education at school an average of 4.1 days per week. Teen's ages 12-17 say that, on average, they should participate in physical activity an average of 3.8 days per week.

Survey Methodology

The survey, which was conducted by Opinion Research Corporation International of Princeton, NJ, is based on interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1,021 adults (18 years of age and older, 50% male/50% female) and 500 teens, ages 12-17. The margin of error for the adult sample is + or - 3 percentage points; when broken into subgroups (those with children in the household) the margin of error is + or - 6 percentage points. The margin of error for the teen sample is + or - 4 percentage points. All interviewing was done from August 1-4, 2002.

*This survey was funded with an unrestricted grant from the National Soft Drink Association.