

Researcher finds Girl Scout meetings provide an opportunity to increase girls' physical activity

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Girls typically are less physically active than boys, but a Kansas State University researcher has found that organizations like Girl Scouts provide an ideal setting to get girls moving early in life and to develop lifelong healthy habits.

Richard Rosenkranz, assistant professor in human [nutrition](#) at K-State, did a study using interventions with Girl Scout troops. He trained group leaders to instruct exercise sessions and promote healthful eating, and in effect taught the girls about a [healthy lifestyle](#) and increased their participation in exercise activities.

"We were striving to get the girls and parents to spend some of their leisure time together being active and taking steps together for fun and health," he said.

Rosenkranz worked with 10- and 11-year-old girls who were members of Girl Scout troops in Manhattan and the surrounding area. The two-year study involved nine troops, with five of the troops receiving an intervention.

"What we saw in the control troops was an environment where girls were sedentary for the vast majority of time at the meeting, combined with snacks that were less than health-promoting," he said. "This is just one part of a girl's weekly or bi-weekly experience, but it offers the chance

to provide an opportunity and a message for health promotion."

Rosenkranz trained the group leaders as part of the intervention. They learned about the background of intervention activities, which included nutrition, family meals, [physical activity](#) and family connection. They also were taught the expectations of being role models and providing a healthful environment at Girl Scout meetings, as well as new physically active games for the girls.

Federal physical activity guidelines recommend that all children perform at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per day, Rosenkranz said. The intervention focused on having the girls participate in walking, dancing, active games and yoga.

"The intervention was focused on physical activities that could be done in or around the home, without special equipment, ideally involving the parents," Rosenkranz said.

He said the girls in the intervention troops were less sedentary than those not in the interventions. Additionally, the girls involved in the intervention performed higher levels of both moderate-intensity and moderate-to-vigorous intensity exercise during troop meetings.

Statistically, Rosenkranz said, minorities acquire lower amounts of physical activity. However, the interventions created the same amount of activity for all demographics and there was no difference by minority or weight status.

An important step of the [intervention](#) was involving the adults. Rosenkranz said adults should be involved in promoting physical activity to children, which can be done through providing formal and informal opportunities for children to be active, being active along with them and encouraging physical activity -- or at least not discouraging it.

"The key for this project to achieve lasting effectiveness is to make an impact on the adults who structure the environments where children spend time; for this study these are the parents and troop leaders," he said. "Both these sets of adults need to recognize that getting sufficient physical activity is essential for the children's health and for their own health."

Source: Kansas State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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