

Parents' perceptions of their child's competence linked to physical activity

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According to a new study, there is no direct link between parents' own level of physical activity, and how much their child may exercise. In fact, parents' perceptions of their children's athleticism are what have a direct impact on the children's activity.

The study by Oregon State University researchers Stewart Trost and Paul Loprinzi, published in the journal *Preventive Medicine*, studied 268 children ages 2 to 5 in early childhood education centers in Queensland, Australia. Of these children, 156 parents or caregivers were surveyed on their parental practices, behaviors related to [physical activity](#) and demographic information.

What they found is that parents' level of physical activity is not directly associated with their children, but instead that the direct link was between parental support and a child's level of physical activity.

"Active parents may be more likely to have active children because they encourage that behavior through the use of support systems and opportunities for physical activity, but there is no statistical evidence that a child is active simply because they see that their parents exercise," Trost said.

Trost, who is director of the [Obesity](#) Prevention Research Core at the new Hallie Ford Center for Healthy Children and Families at OSU, is an international expert on the issue of [childhood obesity](#).

His study found that parents who think their children have some sort of athletic ability were much more likely than other parents to provide instrumental and emotional support for young children to be physically active.

"I think this underscores the need for parents to provide emotional support, as well as opportunities for activity," Trost said. "Regardless of whether a child is athletic or is perceived to be physically gifted, all children need opportunities and encouragement of physical activity."

However, Trost said parental support of physical activity did not translate to a child's behavior once they were not in the home and were in a childcare setting. He said this adds to the body of research showing that both parents as well as childcare providers must provide support for [physical activity](#).

Provided by Oregon State University

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