

# Are families physically active together or couch potatoes?

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A new study by the Department of Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences that examines how physical activity fits into family life has found families rarely take part in physical activity as a family because of the demands of work, school and the different interests of family members.

Little is known about what factors influence families to share in regular physical activity and if and how families are physically active together. A new study that examines how physical activity fits into family life has found families rarely take part in physical activity as a family because of the demands of work, school and the different interests of family members.

The paper, *Physically active families - de-bunking the myth? A qualitative*

*study of family participation in physical activity*, by Professor Janice Thompson and colleagues in the Department of Exercise, [Nutrition](#) and Health Sciences at the University of Bristol is published in *Child: care, health and development*. The study has been funded by a grant from the British Heart Foundation.

The health benefits of regular physical activity for adults and children are well known. In addition to reducing the risks for [chronic diseases](#) such as obesity, [type 2 diabetes](#) and heart disease, taking part in regular physical activity can also help with mental health and well being.

Janice Thompson, Professor of Public Health Nutrition, said: "Despite the many benefits of regular physical activity, the majority of children and adults living in westernised countries such as the UK and the USA do not meet current recommendations for physical activity."

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 parents (26 female, four male) of 10- to 11-year-old schoolchildren who attended low, middle or high socio-economic schools in Bristol.

The majority of parents rated family engagement in physical activity as important, and identified benefits such as increased parent-child communication, spending time together, enjoyment, enhanced mental health, weight control and physical fitness. Despite these benefits most parents reported their families did little or no physical activity together as a family unit during the week, and any activities performed together were usually sedentary in nature.

They reported increased family [physical activity](#) on the weekends but rarely including the full family unit all together. Parents in two-parent households commonly paired off with one or more children because of complexities of schedules. Commonly reported barriers were busy lifestyles, diverse ages and interests of children and adults, bad weather,

and lack of access to facilities, transportation and money to support activities.

Dr Russ Jago, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences, said: "Family-based interventions might be more effective if they are designed to accommodate the complex demands and needs of two-parent and single-parent families and provide affordable, diverse activities appealing to a wide range of interests."

**More information:** Physically active families - de-bunking the myth? A qualitative study of family participation in physical activity, J L Thompson, Child: Care, Health and Development, Volume 36, Issue 2, Pages 265-274 (March 2010). [www3.interscience.wiley.com/jo.../123227409/abstract](http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/jo.../123227409/abstract)

Provided by University of Bristol

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