

Active play is important for children's physical activity

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Active play makes a significant contribution to children's physical activity and could play an important part in the health of future generations, a new study has found.

Many young people do not meet current UK [physical activity](#) guidelines. Preventing the decline in physical activity that occurs as [children](#) enter adolescence may reduce future risk of cardiovascular disease and obesity.

The paper, 'The contribution of active play to the physical activity of primary school children' by Rowan Brockman and colleagues in the Department of Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences at the University of Bristol, is published in [Preventive Medicine](#). The study has been funded by a grant from the British Heart Foundation.

The study found that more frequent active play was associated with greater physical activity levels and a greater intensity of physical activity for both boys and girls on weekdays after school.

Frequent active play was only associated with higher mean activity levels on weekends for boys. The closer association between active play and objectively-measured physical activity after school than at the weekend could be due to children spending more time involved in organised sports clubs or structured family-based physical activities on weekends, reducing opportunities for active play.

Rowan Brockman, research student in the Department of Exercise, Nutrition and [Health Sciences](#), said: “Active play makes a significant contribution to health-enhancing physical activity of many primary school children and may be a valuable focus for future interventions.”

“Our research also suggests that the after-school period, when some children have greater freedom of choice, seems to be a critical period for active play.”

The study examined a cross-section of 747, 10- to 11-year-olds, between February 2008 and March 2009 from 40 primary schools in Bristol. Mean activity levels and minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity per day were calculated. Both measures were averaged across the whole day and for the after-school period (3-6 pm) on weekdays, across both weekend days and across the whole week. Leisure time physical activity was from 3 until 6 pm on weekdays and all-day at weekends. Frequency of active play was self-reported.

The study is part of a larger project, the Bristol 3Ps project, led by Dr Russ Jago, which examines the influences of peers and parents on physical activity participation in 10- to 11-year-old children.

More information: The contribution of active play to the physical activity of primary school children by Rowan Brockman, Russell Jago, Kenneth R. Fox, Department of Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences, University of Bristol, Bristol, UK. Preventive Medicine, Volume 51, Issue 2, August 2010, Pages 144-147.

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