

# Best friends can make a child more physically active

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Boys and girls who take part in physical activity with their best friend in the neighbourhood where they live have higher levels of physical activity, new research has found. With many children not doing enough physical activity the findings could help with the UK's current health care concerns.

The study examined the extent to which the [physical activity](#) modelling and physical activity actions of best [friends](#) are associated with the physical activity of 10- to 11-yr-old children.

The paper, [Better with a buddy: influence of best friends on children's physical activity](#) by Dr Russ Jago and colleagues in the Centre for Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences within the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol, is published online ahead of print in

*Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*. The study has been funded by a grant from the British Heart Foundation (BHF).

Data were collected for 986 children of whom 472 provided complete physical activity and best friend data. Participants identified their “best friend” within the school and answered how often they took part in physical activity with the friend and if the friend had encouraged them to be active. Physical activity was assessed via accelerometer for all children and friends. Mean minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day (Mean MVPA) and mean accelerometer counts per minute (Mean CPM) were obtained for all children and best friends. Regression models were run separately for boys and [girls](#) and used to examine associations between child and best friend physical activity.

Dr Russ Jago, Reader in the Centre for Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences, School for Policy Studies, said: “With many young people not meeting current UK physical activity guidelines there is a need to identify new ways of making children more physically activity.

“Our findings show that supporting physical activity among friendship groups and encouraging friends to be active together, particularly outside of school, may bring about important changes to children’s physical activity.”

The research found boys who have best friends who are physically active engage in greater amounts of physical activity. Girls who frequently take part in active play with their best friend achieve higher levels of physical activity than girls who do so less frequently.

For 10- to 11-yr-old children, engaging in physical activity with their best friend often and outside of school hours is associated with higher levels of physical activity.

For girls, mean MVPA was associated with frequency of activity of the best friend and engaging in physical activity at home or in the neighbourhood, with similar patterns for mean CPM. [Boys'](#) mean MVPA was associated with their best friend's mean MVPA and being active at home or in the local [neighbourhood](#).

The study is part of a larger project, the [Bristol 3Ps Project](#), which examines the influences of peers and parents on physical activity participation in 10- to 11-yr-old children.

Natasha Stewart, Cardiac Nurse at the BHF said: “This research proves the strength of buddy power - simply exercising with a best friend or having a friend who is a good exercise role model increases the chance of a child keeping fit and active. We know that kids who exercise during childhood are more likely to continue these good habits as they grow up - reducing their risk of heart and circulatory disease.

“We are currently faced with a generation of kids whose waistlines are expanding. This research shows that easy initiatives like encouraging your child to run around with their best friend could have a big impact on their health.”

The BHF has a range of resources to keep children and young people fit and active. Visit [bhf.org.uk/teachers](http://bhf.org.uk/teachers) to find out more.

**More information:** Better with a buddy: influence of best friends on children's physical activity by Russell Jago, Kyle MacDonald-Wallis, Janice L Thompson, Angie S Page Rowan Brockman and Kenneth R Fox, Centre for Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences, School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, Bristol, UK. *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, Vol 43, No 2, February 2011.

Provided by University of Bristol

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