

Students 'jump into action' for better health

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The National Survey of Children's Health indicates 31 percent of Missouri children are overweight or obese; yet, the state lacks physical activity requirements for students and nutritional standards for school meals beyond those recommended by the USDA. A new study from the University of Missouri shows Jump Into Action (JIA), a school-based physical activity program, is effective in changing unhealthy youth behaviors.

JIA aims to help fifth-graders make healthy food choices and become more physically active. The program, taught over the course of the school year, uses a team approach to support [students](#) as they set goals to become healthier. Teams of four adults, including the participants' physical education teachers, classroom teachers, school nurses and parents, serve as role models. Students are given pedometers to monitor physical activity, and they attend classroom and physical education lessons weekly. In addition, monthly check-ups reinforce the lessons and parent newsletters allow family members to support health goals at home.

Steve Ball, associate professor of nutrition and [exercise physiology](#) in the College of Human Environmental Sciences and MU Extension State Specialist, says changing behavior in childhood can lead to healthier adult lives.

"Self efficacy plays an important role in how students behave, feel and think," Ball said. "After participating in Jump into Action, students demonstrated increased knowledge of health behaviors, and they adopted

many of these behaviors. These improvements in self efficacy may prove to be important determinants of health for these students in the future."

The purpose of the study was to assess the impact of JIA on physical activity levels, knowledge and engagement in [health behaviors](#), self-efficacy, and goals for improving nutrition and health. The study showed that JIA participants reported drinking less soda and other [sugary drinks](#), being more physically active, and consuming more servings of dairy products, [fruits and vegetables](#). Students also reported decreased screen time, or time spent using the computer, watching television or playing video games.

"I have been impressed with the increased knowledge and awareness that our students have regarding nutrition and exercise," a school nurse said. "They are questioning why school lunches aren't healthier and taking active roles in making informed choices."

More information: The study will be published in *The Journal of Extension*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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