

# Playing team sports encourages young girls to stay physically active

March 7 2012, By Glenda Fauntleroy

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Good news for soccer moms: Girls who join organized team sports at age 11 are more likely to stay physically active as they get older, according to a new study in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

With the escalating number of [obese children](#) in the U.S., efforts to increase the level of exercise among youth have garnered much attention. Only about 8 percent of 12- to 15-year-olds meet Federal guidelines of at least 60 minutes of moderate to [vigorous physical activity](#) each day, according to past research. What's more, girls decrease time spent being [physically active](#) by about half between the ages of 9 and 15.

Jennifer Trilk, Ph.D., lead author of the study, said encouraging young

girls to play organized sports is key to getting and keeping them physically active.

“Sixth grade girls who start out on a community sport team have a greater likelihood of joining the school sport team as their school offers more opportunities in the 7th and 8th grades,” said Trilk of the department of [exercise](#) science at the University of South Carolina in Columbia.

“Because they become involved, they develop not only skills related to their sport, but also develop social support and relationships within the team environment that will increase their likelihood of staying on through middle school,” she added.

The researchers analyzed data from 957 girls who participated in the Trial of Activity for Adolescent Girls conducted in six states across the U.S. The girls were measured as 6th graders and again as 8th graders to identify patterns of physical activity and sedentary behavior to see which girls had the most minutes of physical activity and which showed a change from 6th to 8th grade.

The girls were surveyed about their participation in sports teams and reported their general behavior over three days, including time spent doing homework, sleeping, surfing the Internet or playing recreational sports. The girls were placed into clusters by whatever activity they did most frequently. The girls also wore accelerometers to record their physical activity over 6 days.

Sixth grade girls who did either “sports and play” or “organized team sports/lessons” had more daily minutes of physical activity (27 minutes and 25 minutes, respectively) than girls who participated more frequently in other behaviors, such as playing video games (22 minutes). And although by 8th grade, physical activity had declined among all

clusters, girls in “organized [team sports](#)/lessons” had the smallest decline.

“As youth enter adolescence, peers are going to have a very strong impact on [physical activity](#),” said Georgia Frey, Ph.D., associate professor in the Kinesiology Department at Indiana University.

[Girls](#) should be taught how to enjoy movement and provided many opportunities for activity that aren’t restricted to competition and teams where the focus is involvement rather than winning, she added.

**More information:** Trilk JL, Pate RR, et al. (2012). A cluster analysis of physical activity and sedentary behavior patterns in middle school girls. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. In Press.

Provided by Health Behavior News Service

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