

Research finds health benefits from free play

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Cheap items like crates and buckets encourage children to be more active and creative than expensive play equipment, researchers have found. The findings are the result of a long-term study by RMIT University researchers in Melbourne, Australia, into the play differences of primary school children with access to different playgrounds. Introducing simple, everyday objects during recess and lunchtime can cut sedentary behaviour by half, improve creativity and boost social and problem solving skills, the research shows.

Recent study results have been published in the international journal *BMC Public Health*. The two-year research project, led by Dr Brendon Hyndman from the School of Medical Sciences, found traditional school playgrounds may be stifling imaginative and energetic [play](#).

"Conventional playgrounds are designed by adults - they don't actually take into consideration how the children want to play," Dr Hyndman said. "At a time when childhood obesity is growing and playgrounds are shrinking, we need a creative approach to stimulate physical activity among schoolchildren."

The RMIT study involved 120 students, aged between five and 12, from the newly-built Emmaus Catholic Primary School in Ballarat, a regional town in the Australian state of Victoria. Their results were compared with another [school](#) in the area which had traditional play equipment such as monkey bars and slides.

Buckets, pipes, exercise mats, hay bales and swimming pool noodles

were placed in the play areas at Emmaus and researchers recorded the students' behaviour. Sedentary behaviour, defined as sitting or standing around the playground, fell from 61.5 per cent of children to 30.5 per cent during the study.

Students who played with everyday household objects took 13 more steps per minute and played more intensively and vigorously compared to those using the traditional playground.

"These results could be applied to anywhere that children play and shift the debate on the best way to keep our [children](#) healthy."

More information: Brendon P Hyndman, Amanda C Benson, Shahid Ullah and Amanda Telford. "Evaluating the effects of the Lunchtime Enjoyment Activity and Play (LEAP) school playground intervention on children's quality of life, enjoyment and participation in physical activity." *BMC Public Health* 2014, 14:164 [DOI: 10.1186/1471-2458-14-164](#)

Provided by RMIT University

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