

Fun and friends key to getting teens off the couch

December 15 2015, by Michelle Wheeler, Sciencenetwork Wa

Forms of exercise that prioritises having fun, group activities and keeping healthy rather than competition could be the key to getting WA teenagers more active, research suggests.

A survey of more than 1500 14-year-olds found they ranked having an opportunity to compete or win something amongst the least important factors for their future participation in physical activity, with girls placing even less importance on competition and winning than boys.

The study found the most important things for the [teenagers](#) doing physical activity were the chance to have a lot of fun, spend time with friends, keep fit and healthy and feel good about themselves.

Girls in particular tend to do less [exercise](#) as they hit adolescence but lessons from the study could be used to get teenagers moving, lead researcher and University of Notre Dame exercise scientist Beth Hands says.

"We know that if you've got friends to join and do stuff with you're more likely to do that," she says.

We can sometimes come at promoting physical activity from the wrong angle, Professor Hands says, and advise against telling teenagers they need to exercise to win or compete.

"This puts a lot of pressure and anxiety on them as they don't see that as

a motivator or as really important as to why they should be engaged in [physical activity](#)," she says.

^o_{Bj}, ^o_{Bj} The research used data from the Western Australian Pregnancy Cohort (Raine) Study, one of the largest studies of pregnancy, childhood and adolescence in the world, and was published in the journal *Child: care, health and development*.

The survey also asked the students about the likely outcomes if they were physically active over the next year.

It determined that teenagers believed exercise would make or keep them fit and healthy, and help them to feel good about themselves.

But teenagers with poor motor skills were less likely to think they would see these health and fitness benefits and more likely to think others would make fun of them if they tried.

Identifying teenagers with low motor competence is particularly important because we already know this group typically exercise less and are less fit than their peers. Prof Hands says.

"If they can't perform a skill well they're quite concerned that people will make fun of them, that's one of the reasons why we know adolescents with poor motor skills withdraw," she says.

More information: B. Hands et al. Gender and motor competence affects perceived likelihood and importance of physical activity outcomes among 14 year olds, *Child: Care, Health and Development* (2015). [DOI: 10.1111/cch.12298](https://doi.org/10.1111/cch.12298)

This article first appeared on [ScienceNetwork Western Australia](#) a

science news website based at Scitech.

Provided by Science Network WA

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