

Physical Activity

- Participation in regular physical activity improves health. It strengthens cardiovascular function; reduces the risk of developing type II diabetes, hypertension and hyperlipidemia; and positively influences choices pertaining to nutrition and the decision not to smoke.¹
- Physical activity is also associated with better mental health through a better control of the effects of stress and anxiety and a reduction of depression symptoms, and has a positive effect on the many components of physical health,²
- The most popular activities of Canadians are walking (81%), gardening and yard work (70%), swimming (54%), social dancing (46%), home exercise (45%) and bicycling (45%).³
- Estimates of the increase in the prevalence of overweight (including obesity) among boys range from a doubling to a tripling in the 15 years leading up to 1996; estimates for girls range from a 60% increase to a doubling.⁴
- Parents of active children are more likely to believe strongly in the positive benefits of physical activity, such as enhanced growth and development.⁵
- An important reason why children take part in physical activity is simply because they have fun and enjoyed it. For some children this enjoyment may be related to opportunities for competition and achievement. For others, enjoyment may be related to opportunities for spending time with friends.⁶
- Canada's Physical Activity Guide for Children and Youth suggests that adolescents should increase the time *currently* spent on physical activity starting with at least 30 minutes *more* per day. Then progress gradually from there until they reach at least 90 minutes of daily physical activity.⁷
- The health benefits of physical activity have been widely publicized in the 1998 *Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living*¹ and the 1996 US Surgeon General's report on physical activity and health. However, studies suggest that 62% of Canadians are still not active enough to reap the health benefits of a physically active lifestyle.⁸

¹ Tremblay, Mark, J. W. Inman and J. D. Willms. 2000. The relationship between physical activity, self-esteem and academic achievement in 12-year old children. *Pediatric Exercise Science*. 12: 312-323.

² Thibault, Guy. 2000. *Physical Activity: A determinant of health in youth*. Kino-Quebec Scientific Committee.

³ Craig, Cora L. *et al.* 2001. Increasing physical activity: building a supportive recreation and sport system. Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute.

⁴ Perez, Claudio. 2003. Children who become active. *Supplement to Health Reports*, Health Canada

⁵ Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. March 1999. *Children and physical activity A call for action on a significant health issue*.

⁶ Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre. 2003. Children and Physical Activity: A Systematic Review of Barriers and Facilitators. United Kingdom.

⁷ Canadian Adolescents at Risk Research Network. February 2004. *Physical Activity Patterns in Canadian Adolescents*. Queen's University.

⁸ Katzmarzyk, P. *et al.* 2000. The Economic Burden of Physical Inactivity in Canada. *CMAJ*, 163(11):1435-40