

Sport and children

Only six out of 10 children aged between five and 14 years participate in sport outside of school, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The rate of obesity among children and teenagers (21 per cent for boys, 23 per cent for girls) indicates that we need to foster a more sports-minded culture that encourages children to be physically active. People who are active dramatically reduce their risk of many diseases including heart disease and osteoporosis. Regular exercise is also known to reduce the risk of emotional problems such as anxiety and depression. Habits are established early in life, and evidence suggests that physically active children are more likely to mature into physically active adults.

Benefits for children

Some of the many benefits of sport participation for children include:

- Reduced risk of obesity
- Increased cardiovascular fitness
- Healthy growth of bones, muscles, ligaments and tendons
- Improved coordination and balance
- Greater ability to physically relax and, therefore, avoid the complications of chronic muscular tension (such as headache or back ache)
- Improved sleep
- Mental health benefits, such as greater confidence
- Improved social skills
- Improved personal skills, including cooperation and leadership.

Sedentary pursuits

Around 30 per cent of Australian children don't participate in sport at all. Common sedentary activities that compete with physical activity include:

- Homework
- Computer games
- Internet use
- Television.

Children's participation in sport

The Australian Bureau of Statistics collected information on the activities of children aged five to 14 years in the 12 months to April 2000. Selected statistics from the report *Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities, Australia* include:

- 59 per cent (1.6 million) participated outside school hours in sports organised by schools, clubs or associations.
- More boys (66%) than girls (52%) participated in sports.
- 32 per cent of boys and 20 per cent of girls played more than one sport.
- 52 per cent of boys and 45 per cent of girls played sport 53 times or more during the year.
- The most popular sports for boys included soccer (20%), swimming (13%), Australian Rules football (13%) and outdoor cricket (10%).
- The most popular sports for girls included netball (18%), swimming (16%), tennis (8%) and basketball (6%).
- 64 per cent of children rode bicycles.
- 31 per cent of children skateboarded or inline skated.

The influence of family

It seems that the type of family and family background influences a child's participation in organised sports outside school. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics report *Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities, Australia*:

- Children living in couple families had a higher rate of participation in organised sport (61%) than those living in one-parent families (51%).
- Children living in couple families with both parents born overseas in countries other than the main English-speaking countries were among the least likely to participate (38%).
- Children living with a single parent born overseas in countries other than the main English-speaking countries were among the least likely to participate (39%).
- Children living in couple families with both parents employed were more likely to participate in organised sport (69%) than those living in couple families with either one employed parent (53%) or no employed parents (41%).

Encourage your child to be physically active

Parents can help their children to be physically active in a number of ways, including:

- Lead by example - be physically active yourself.
- Make sure that some family outings offer opportunities for physical activity, such as playing sport together.
- Encourage your child to walk or ride their bicycle for short trips, rather than rely on you to drive them.
- Support your child's efforts in sport. Make sure you're there at each match, cheering them on from the sidelines.
- Set time limits on sedentary activities like computer games and television.
- Consult with your child's school on ways to encourage greater participation in sports and physical activity.

Sport safety issues

Many sporting injuries sustained by children can be avoided. Suggestions include:

- Always wear appropriate protective gear.
- Mouth guards should be worn for all contact sports. See your dentist for professional fitting.
- Wear knee, elbow and wrist guards for all sports that include a risk of falling, such as inline skating or skateboarding.
- Wear shin pads for such sports as hockey, softball and cricket where injuries to the front of the lower leg are relatively common.
- Helmets can reduce the risk of eye and face injuries.
- Make sure to thoroughly warm up and cool down.
- Cross-train with other sports to ensure overall fitness and strength.
- Use good form and technique.
- Allow adequate recovery time between sessions.

Where to get help

- Your child's school
- Sporting clubs and associations
- Your doctor

Things to remember

- Only six out of 10 children aged between five and 14 years participate in sport outside of school.
- More boys (66%) than girls (52%) participate in sports.
- Evidence suggests that physically active children are more likely to mature into physically active adults.
- Parents can encourage their children to play sport in many ways including through role modelling.

Want to know more?

For references, related links and support group information, go to [More information](#).

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:



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More Information

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