



Time to Get Moving

FINDINGS ON EXERCISE AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

From the 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey
Arlington, Virginia

The choices that young people make today have a big impact on their health and well-being, now and in the future.

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) asks young people about those behaviors and habits with the strongest links to their health.

This brochure takes a quick look at the findings on exercise and physical education from Arlington's March 2007 survey of middle and high school students.

WHY WORRY?

The benefits of regular exercise are well-established and irrefutable (see box below). Despite this fact, many young people don't get recommended levels of exercise and physical activity declines as they get older.

Kids have to be healthy to learn and they have to learn how to be healthy.

-William Potts-Datema
Harvard School of Public Health

Children and adolescents should be active every day. Experts recommend they get *at least* 60 minutes of moderate intensity exercise most days and preferably daily. For the greatest health benefit, kids should spend at least 20 minutes, three times a week, doing vigorous exercise like running or swimming laps.

BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

- ✓ Increases energy and endurance
- ✓ Helps relieve stress and anxiety
- ✓ Helps people to maintain a normal weight by increasing metabolism
- ✓ Helps some people to sleep better
- ✓ Helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints
- ✓ Reduces the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes
- ✓ Supports better learning directly and indirectly through better self-esteem and reduced tardiness

HOW WE DID THE SURVEY

These findings are based on a survey of about 2500 students enrolled in grades six, eight, ten and twelve in Arlington's public secondary schools. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Parents had an opportunity to opt out their child. Less than two percent did. Eighty-six percent of students in the classes chosen for the survey filled out a questionnaire. Most of those who did not were absent from school.

EXERCISE PATTERNS

- Only forty percent of youth get enough exercise to meet current recommendations.
- The percent of youth who get adequate exercise falls from half of 6th grade students to one-third of 12th grade students.
- About 60 percent of youth in 8th and 10th grade - but only half of youth in 12th grade - reported 20 minutes of vigorous exercise three times a week.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education classes play a key role in promoting fitness. A nationwide study by the Centers for Disease Control in 2002 found that most children ages 9 to 13 do not participate in organized sports or activities outside of school. Physical education classes are the primary way for many young people to exercise.

Youth in Arlington take physical education classes in elementary and middle school and for at least two years of high school. However, they alternate physical education with health classes. (At any given time, about a fourth of students in 6th, 8th and 10th grades are taking health.)

- 90 percent of 10th graders but only 13 percent of 12th graders were enrolled in physical education class.
- About 75 percent of 8th and 10th grade students taking physical education said they exercise for 20 minutes or more while in class.

LIFETIME PATTERNS

Efforts to increase physical activity should begin *before* adolescence. That's the conclusion of a recent study that tracked young people over time and found that physical activity patterns generally *worsen* as teens transition into adulthood. Inactive youth tended to stay that way and few of the active students continued their pattern. (*American Journal of Preventive Medicine, November 2004*)

To encourage the development of healthy lifetime exercise patterns, Arlington Public Schools has added new activities and equipment, including climbing walls, mountain bikes, and aerobic steps. New cooperative activities (part of Adventure Education) help youth to be more fit and to develop skills such as problem-solving and team-building.

Fitness also includes muscle strength and endurance and flexibility. Young people can improve in these areas through *supervised* strength training (for those age 12 and older) and stretching.

ENCOURAGING EXERCISE

How can community members encourage young people to be active? Here are some ideas from the Office of the Surgeon General:

- Be good role models by exercising on a regular basis. Just walking is fine.
- Support high-quality physical education classes in school that emphasize lifelong fitness.
- Provide a wide range of programs and sports opportunities to meet the needs and interests of different adolescents.
- Encourage health care providers to talk to youth about the importance of staying active and physically fit.

ESPECIALLY FOR PARENTS

1. Help your child to find sports or exercise programs that they enjoy. Kids say they exercise for fun, to be with friends, and to learn new skills.
2. Encourage your child to try lots of activities, not just team sports. Few youth continue to play on teams as adults and too much emphasis on competition turns many young people away from physical activity.
3. Make fitness a family activity by spending time together throwing a frisbee, hiking or raking leaves.
4. Ensure that kids have proper shoes and protective gear for the activity. Check with a doctor before starting a new exercise program.

TOO MUCH TELEVISION?

Most young people (71 percent) report that they watch two hours or less of television on a typical school day. For the other 29 percent, replacing time spent watching TV or videos with time spent exercising could have substantial health benefits.

TO LEARN MORE

For more information on exercise classes, sports leagues and hiking trails here in Arlington, go to www.arlingtonva.us/Portals/Topics/FitArlingtonMain.aspx#playasport

For more ideas on getting your family to be more active, try these sites:

Fitness and Your 13 to 18-year-old at www.kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition_fit/fitness/fitness_13_18.html

Fitness for Kids: Getting Your Children Off the Couch at www.mayoclinic.com/health/fitness/FL00030

Physical Activity: Recommendations for Young People at www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/everyone/recommendations/children.htm

For questions about the data or survey process, contact Amy Graham, Data Coordinator, at (703) 228-1668 or agraha@arlingtonva.us.

Partnership for Children, Youth, and Families
3033 Wilson Blvd., Suite 600A
Arlington, VA 22201
Phone (703) 228-1667
www.arlingtonpartnershipforyouth.org