



Friday 15 May 2009

Active Kids are Healthy Kids!

HEALTH FACTS

PREVALENCE OF OVERWEIGHT AND OBESE CHILDREN IN AUSTRALIA:

Childhood obesity is now considered a new morbidity. ¹

In the short term, children who are overweight or obese frequently experience psychological problems such as poor body image, disordered eating, bullying and low self esteem. They may also develop a range of risks factors including:

1. Asthma
2. Sleep apnea
3. Early development of heart disease such as raised blood pressure
4. Type 2 Diabetes. ¹³

The results of the Australian National Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey 2007 were released in October 2008.

The study reported the following statistics for children 2-16 years:

- 17% were classified as overweight
- 6% were obese.

Children who were obese averaged a lower level of physical activity compared to children who were of a normal weight or overweight¹⁸.

Research shows that young people who were overweight or obese as children are likely to be overweight as adults. ¹⁴

Childhood obesity in Australia is rising at an annual rate of 1%, a trend which suggests that half of all young Australians will be overweight by the year 2025. ¹⁴

TEACHING HEALTHY HABITS AT A YOUNG AGE:

Teaching children healthy habits from a young age is important with recent evidence showing the early years lay the foundations for children's later health and wellbeing. The Heart Foundation states, habits last a lifetime and that 'it is important to encourage the development of healthy eating and physical activity habits in children and then reinforce these habits in adolescence'. ²

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IDEALS:

The Australian Government's Physical Activity Recommendations for Children and Young People are that they should:

- ii. Participate in at least 60 minutes (and up to several hours) of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity every day
- iii. Not spend more than two hours a day using electronic media for entertainment (for example computer games, internet, TV) particularly during daylight hours.¹²

Statistics from the Australian National Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey 2007 showed the average time spent by children on moderate to vigorous physical activity decreased with increasing age, particularly in girls.¹⁸

Adults can act as role models for children to encourage them to be physically active. For adults, good health is as easy as just 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity each day, as recommended by the National Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults. This 30 minutes can be broken up into 10 minute bouts of activity. Active Transport includes walking to work, to the bus or the train station which are great ways to include walking activity in your day.¹⁶

As a regular activity, walking is important in the prevention of:

- Coronary heart disease
- Stroke
- Type II diabetes
- Falls, fractures and injuries (through improved strength and coordination)
- Colon cancer
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Osteoporosis
- Depression
- Lower back pain.

Walking also improves:

- Psychological well-being
- Metabolism
- Muscle strength and flexibility
- Strength and endurance
- Respiratory function
- Concentration and memory.

As well as:

- Strengthening the immune system
- Increasing energy levels
- Managing weight.¹⁶

DIABETES:

Type 1 diabetes usually arises in childhood or youth (though it can occur at any age) and is characterised by the inability to produce insulin.

It is currently thought that a combination of genetic and environmental factors are involved in the development of the disease (Daneman 2006; Devendra et al. 2004), though research continues into the exact nature of these risk factors³.

Type 2 is the most common form of diabetes. It is marked by reduced or less effective insulin. Although uncommon in childhood, it is becoming increasingly recognised in that group⁴.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS:

From parents' reports, nearly 7% (or 280,000) Australian children under 15 have long-term mental health or behavioural problems.⁶

According to *beyondblue*, regular physical activity like walking can help prevent and treat mild to moderate anxiety and depression.⁷

Exercise increases the level of endorphins – the 'feel-good' chemicals in the brain.

Regular exercise can increase energy levels, help block negative thoughts, increase social interaction and improve well-being.

ASTHMA:

The most frequently reported long-term illness of children is, according to their parents, asthma. It is thought that 30% of all GP visits by children relate to respiratory problems.⁸

Australia has one of the highest rates of childhood asthma in the world with around 15% of children or 600,000 suffering from this illness.⁹

PARENTING & LIFESTYLE:

There is evidence in Australia that children's intake of energy has increased in recent times. This increase is thought to be due to:

- i. Increased availability of highly refined, calorie dense food (Cook et al. 2001; Magarey et al. 2001)
- ii. Difficulty accessing fresh fruit and vegetables, particularly in remote parts of Australia
- iii. Increased marketing of highly refined foods to children (Zuppa et al. 2003).¹⁰

Australia as a nation, has developed a more sedentary lifestyle and as such, children of today are far less likely than children of previous generations to use walking or cycling as a means of transport or to play outdoors. Instead, playing console and computer games and watching television and DVDs/videos are very popular leisure activities among children (ABS 2001a). These "in-activities" has become the new "play".¹¹ The results of the Australian National Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey 2007 revealed that only one third of the children aged between 9 and 16 years met the recommendations for screen time in the National Physical Activity Recommendations (no more than two hours of non-educational screen time each day). Participation in screen based activities peaked in children aged 13-14 years, where screen time varied from 3.5 hours in girls to over 4 hours in boys¹⁸.

RESOURCES

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For more information visit Walk.com.au or contact your state's PR Coordinator:

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