



Schools on the Move

Pedometers in Schools Project

Physical Activity

Why is the promotion of physical activity important?

There is now a wealth of research evidence demonstrating the benefits to health from regular activity. Potential benefits include:

- healthy growth and development
- maintenance of energy balance (in order to encourage a healthy weight)
- avoidance of risk factors for Coronary Heart Disease (CHD)
- reduction in anxiety and stress
- opportunities for social interaction, achievement and mental well-being
- improvement of social and moral development
- possible improved cognitive functioning and academic achievement in school

In addition, active children are less likely to smoke, drink alcohol or use illegal drugs than inactive children.

How much physical activity should young people do?

Children and young people should achieve a total of at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity each day. At least twice a week this should include activities to improve bone health, muscle strength and flexibility.

The 60 minute target can be achieved by accumulating bouts of activity throughout the day.

As we start to achieve the five hour offer for all young people, more and more emphasis is being placed on the need to think differently about what we offer and how we package sport and physical activity to engage young people. Schools on the Move is just one of many Youth Sport Trust initiatives that will support the development of the 5 hour offer.





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How many steps a day should young people do?

The initial focus with pedometers is to increase the total number of daily steps without any reference to intensity or duration of activity. By doing this, young people will begin to appreciate how much activity they are doing and what opportunities there are for them to increase this.

The Schools on the Move programme's recommendation for average daily step targets for young people is

15,000 steps a day

For adults the average daily step target is 10,000 steps a day.

These daily step targets are not directly related to the main physical activity recommendation, but generally those reaching the target number of steps are more likely to be reaching recommended physical activity targets. Once young people start to increase their daily steps they can gradually be encouraged to move towards meeting the recommended 60 minutes of moderate activity each day.

How active are young people?

The link between physical activity and well being is well established. However the couch kids culture of computer game playing, TV watching and web surfing often limits the opportunities to be physically active as part of a healthy lifestyle. Indeed, approximately 30% of boys and 40% of girls are still not meeting the recommended levels of activity to benefit their health.

Of particular concern nationally are the rising levels of obesity among young people. Currently there are over 1 million obese children in the UK and if trends continue, it is predicted that 22% of girls and 19% of boys (under 11) will be obese by 2010.

Encouraging a healthy lifestyle is essential as physical activity has important beneficial effects not only on current health status but also future health status of young people.

What can schools do?

Schools have a key role to play in promoting increased participation in physical activity - during term time, children in Britain spend 40-45% of their





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waking hours at school. Schools have a captive audience of young people and are ideally placed to provide them with opportunities to be active and also to help them acquire the skills, understanding and confidence to pursue activity and move towards becoming independent exercisers.

A school with an environment and ethos that supports physical activity can make a significant impact on young people's attitudes and activity behaviour. The physical activity experiences a young person has at school are instrumental in fostering good activity habits for life.

What types of activities should pupils be doing?

Any physical activity is beneficial, and just encouraging pupils to increase their daily steps, irrespective of intensity and duration is a good starting point.

However, it is recommended that young people should aim to accumulate at least one hour of *moderate intensity* physical activity a day. This means that about 6000 of their total steps each day should be spent participating in moderate intensity activity, ideally in bouts of 1000-1500 steps at a time (approximately 10-15 minutes).

As a guide, 'moderate' intensity means activity that makes pupils breathe a little harder than normal and maybe feel a little warmer. Examples include:

- Brisk walking
- Swimming
- Cycling
- Dancing
- Most sports

Pupils should include some activities that improve bone health such as:

- Gymnastics
- Dance
- Aerobics
- Skipping
- Sports such as basketball

and also some activities that enhance strength e.g.:

- Climbing
- Skipping





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- Jumping
- Body conditioning and resistance exercises

Through the curriculum and out of hours provision, schools should introduce pupils to a wide range of activities so that they can develop the skills and confidence to participate and find activities that they enjoy. A diverse range of activities is important to ensure that the needs and interests of all pupils are catered for.

How does walking fit in?

Walking, particularly if brisk, is one of the best forms of exercise there is – it is easy to do, requires no specialist facilities or equipment and can easily be fitted into a person's daily routine. Walking is an ideal activity to introduce into schools as it:

- Provides opportunities for success, regardless of age and ability
- Helps unskilled and obese children
- Provides long and short term health benefits
- Increases the likelihood of pupils becoming active adults
- Engages children beyond the P.E. lesson and encourages independent exercising

