Schools vs Cancer Physical Activity Guide
Middle School

cancer.org/schools | 1.800.227.2345
Building a Case for Physical Activity Among Kids

Too many American kids are sedentary, which has led to an increased prevalence in obesity and overweight. Establishing an active lifestyle early in life is important, because kids who grow up being physically active tend to stay active as adults – and staying active can help reduce the risk of cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes.¹

Being physically active has many health benefits – and it’s fun, too! Regular physical activity improves strength and endurance, helps build healthy bones and muscles, helps control weight, reduces anxiety and stress, increases self-esteem, and improves blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Physically active and fit kids also tend to perform better academically.

Did you know?

The combination of excess pounds and too little exercise is putting our youth at risk for serious health problems as they get older. The following statistics show just how serious this problem is:

• Only 30% of youth attended physical education classes daily in 2015, and only 52% had physical education class at least once a week.²

• In 2015, almost 42% of youth played video or computer games or used a computer for something other than school work for 3 or more hours on an average school day.²

• Obese children are more likely to become obese adults. And obesity in adulthood tends to be more severe in those who were overweight as children.³

• In the US, more than 1 out of 3 adults and 1 out of 5 children are obese.⁴

• Since the 1970’s, obesity rates among children has almost tripled.¹

• Overall, about 1 in every 8 young people are obese, and 1 in 6 are overweight.⁵

• Obesity affects about 12.7 million children and adolescents.⁵

³United States. CDC. Childhood Obesity Facts. (2017); https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/obesity/facts.htm
⁴United States. CDC. National Center for Health Statistics. Overweight and Obesity. (2016); https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/obesity/obesity.htm
⁵United States. CDC. Overweight and Obesity, Childhood overweight and obesity. (2019); https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood/
Willpower and lack of knowledge are not the only challenges that prevent young people from achieving wellness. Many do not meet the minimum physical activity recommendations for several reasons:

- Not enough safe, affordable places to play in neighborhoods, and community designs that lack sidewalks, bike lanes, parks, and green space
- Reductions in physical education requirements in schools
- Competition from more sedentary activities, such as playing video games, watching television, or using a computer

**Physical activity and academic performance**

Even though physical activity is good for health and wellness, fewer than 4% of middle schools provide daily physical education (PE). Budget constraints and increasing pressure to improve standardized test scores have caused many school officials to question the value of PE and other physical activity programs. The result has been substantial reductions in the time available for PE.

Despite potential obstacles and misconceptions, it is important and valuable to youth health for teachers to rally together to support children on their journey to wellness. Let’s debunk some common misconceptions about physical activity in schools:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FALSE</th>
<th>FACT</th>
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<tr>
<td>Physical activity with peers has no real benefit.</td>
<td>Research states that sociocultural influences include support for and participation in physical activity of peers and siblings.7</td>
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<td>Issuing new assignments is the only way to meet all learning objectives and keep students engaged. Students do not benefit from study breaks.</td>
<td>Short activity breaks throughout the day can improve students’ concentration skills and classroom behavior. Studies have shown better on-task behavior and overall improved behavior when students were given regular brief activity breaks throughout the day.8</td>
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<td>Cutting physical education for classroom time is a sure way to improve academic performance.</td>
<td>Studies show that students whose time in PE or other physical activity at school was increased either maintained or improved their grades and standardized achievements test scores, even though they received less instructional class time than students in control groups.9</td>
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Teachers can help by knowing the facts

Getting enough physical activity is critical to maintaining a healthy weight. Physically active lifestyles can benefit your students, your school, and your community. So, help students take steps toward better health by being more physically active each day!

The American Cancer Society’s guidelines for physical activity help parents and teachers understand the exercise kids need:

- Limit sedentary behavior such as sitting, lying down, and watching TV and other forms of screen-based entertainment.

- Doing some physical activity above usual activities, no matter what one’s level of activity, can have many health benefits.

- Children and teens should get at least 60 minutes of moderate- or vigorous-intensity activity each day, with vigorous activity on at least three days each week.

Moderate physical activity includes walking, skating, or dancing, and sports, such as baseball, softball, volleyball, doubles tennis, or golf. Vigorous activities include jogging and running, swimming, martial arts, jumping rope, and sports like soccer, hockey, singles tennis, and basketball.

Teaching your students about physical activity

Supplemental materials can be found as part of this packet or on our website. The objective(s) of the classroom activity sheets include:

- Increasing knowledge of students, teachers, and parents regarding the need for physical activity among kids.

- Empowering students to become agents of change in their homes and within their communities as they plan and execute physical activity efforts.

- Helping students discover the ways in which their social environment impacts their perception of health.

In addition to the material mentioned above, we have also included useful notes on ways you can adopt and encourage healthy habits at your Schools vs Cancer events. Also, we are sharing links where you can find more inspiration for supporting this journey to wellness.
Classroom Activities

Worksheet activities are included, but here are some ideas to integrate physical activity into classroom discussions or activities:

Physical fitness

- **Option 1:** If possible, take a walk around the school every day for a week. This will promote healthy habits and exercise and show students how easy it is to get active. Get a map of the school, and divide the class into different groups. Designate student “tour guides,” and during your daily walks have each group lead the class in different physical exercises at different areas of the school. For each activity, have the students find out how many calories they burned during the activity.

- **Option 2:** Have a class discussion about the students’ favorite physical activities. Make a chart of each one, and discuss what muscles they use in each activity.

- **Option 3:** Have each student create their own “personal trainer” workout. It should be at least 60 minutes long and include exercises that touch on endurance, strength, and flexibility.

Additional resources (for parents):

*Physical activity – A family affair* information sheet. This information sheet is designed to alert and motivate parents and caregivers to get active for themselves and for their families.

*Physical Activities at your Schools vs Cancer event* information sheet - This information sheet suggests activities you can use to highlight physical activity information during your event.

Additional Activities

- Have students conduct a walkability/bikeability/playability assessment of their neighborhood. Do they have sidewalks? Bike lanes? Parks? Playgrounds? What makes it easier, or harder, for them to be active where they live? What could they do to make it easier to be more active?

- Encourage students (and their parents) to walk or bike to school. Discuss whether it was easy or hard to do, and why. If it was hard, brainstorm ways the students could “speak up” in their communities to help reduce barriers to being more active. Encourage your school to participate in Safe Routes to School initiatives.

  - [saferoutesinfo.org](http://saferoutesinfo.org)

- Incorporate daily classroom energy breaks.

  - [instantrecess.com](http://instantrecess.com)

- Explore the “Active Schools” website ([activeschoolsus.org](http://activeschoolsus.org)). What ideas for active schools, active families, and active communities (check out the tabs FOR PARENTS and ACTIVE CLASSROOMS) do the students like? Which do they think they can do? How can they get started? How can they get their families, friends, and neighbors involved?
• Incorporate healthy, active celebration ideas (dance party, extra recess time in honor of birthdays, etc.).
  
  - actionforhealthykids.org/game-on/find-challenges/classroom-challenges/1249-healthy-and-active-classroom-parties
  

• Start an activity challenge – Set individual goals and track minutes of physical activity (ask for parental involvement!). Choose a destination and see how long it takes to get there. Incorporate different challenges: classrooms vs. classrooms; students vs. teachers, etc.

• No-screen week – Encourage students to give up TV, computers, and gaming devices for day/week and replace with family activity time. Ask them to report back. Was it easy to do? Hard? What made it that way? What did you do instead? How can you encourage others to do the same?

• Challenge students to try a new activity (again, involve parents). What did they like? Not like? Would they do it again?

• Create a classroom team for a local Relay For Life event, and have someone on the track at all times.

Physical activities at your Schools vs Cancer event

• Have a band (or some online music videos and good speakers), and get people dancing.

• Count your laps! As students complete each lap, give them a paper clip or a bead and some string so they can make a chain. At the end of the Schools vs Cancer event, they will have something to commemorate their laps.

• Host an aerobics class. Check with local universities, YMCAs, or athletic clubs for some volunteer instructors.

• Set up volleyball or badminton nets and equipment.

• Provide balls, Frisbees, croquet, or bocci balls for people to play with when they aren’t walking.

• Organize active games like dodgeball, volleyball, or flag football.

• Have activity-based contests:
  - Who can do the most jumping jacks without stopping?
  - Who can dance the longest?
  - Who can do the most push-ups?

Present awards to:

• People playing Frisbee, volleyball, walking extra laps, etc.

• Adults playing games with kids
Announce “special laps,” and invite the following groups to take a lap:

- Any PE instructors, exercise leaders, or fitness trainers
- Anyone who tries to get in physical activity each day
- Anyone who regularly takes the stairs instead of the elevator
- Anyone who works out with a friend or family member
- Anyone who gets up early to work out
- Any kids who take PE classes
- Any kids who would rather ride their bike, roller blade, or play outside than watch TV

Have ongoing announcements throughout the Schools vs Cancer event, such as:

- Be active! Set a goal of being active at least 1 hour each day, and remember – more IS better!
- Get up ... get moving ... have fun!
- Add more physical activity to your day! Try:
  - Taking a family walk after dinner
  - Riding your bike
  - Playing with your kids
  - Dancing and skipping
  - Parking your car farther from your office
  - Taking the stairs
  - Joining your Schools vs Cancer team for walk breaks during the day

For Parents

Being active as a family has great rewards! Did you know that staying active can help reduce the risk of cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes? How would you feel if you learned that you have the power to influence your child’s quality of life?

Well, you do. Not only can being active together help make your whole family healthier, it can give you some enjoyable quality time together.

In the near future, your kid(s) will begin bringing home educational material and activities that will help them better understand the need for physical activity, discover creative ways to get moving, and overcome barriers to physical activity in their living environment. With this in mind, we strongly encourage you to join them on their journey to generations of wellness.

Give gifts that encourage physical activity, such as:

- Bikes, skateboards, and scooters
- Balls, bats, gloves, and racquets
- Athletic shoes or workout clothes
- Gift cards for athletic stores to purchase sports equipment
Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Go for a walk after dinner.
- Set a “no” or “not too much” TV time rule during the week; encourage outdoor activity instead.
- When you do watch TV, make it a “family rule” to do something active during commercials, such as sit-ups, squats, or jumping jacks. You could even do a fun or silly dance!
- Walk wherever you can, whenever you can: to the store for a few items, to the library, to a neighborhood restaurant, to the dry cleaner.
- Spend active time together on the weekends. Go for a hike or a bike ride or play tennis.
- Keep track of your activity. Keep a calendar and write down what activity you do as a family. Start a contest to see who has the most activity each week.
- Take active vacations: Go on a bike tour or a camping trip where you hike to your campsite.
- Get in the habit of parking your car as far as you can from the front door of the grocery store, mall, library, restaurant, or school. Extra steps add up!
- Try geocaching. Add a high-tech hide-and-seek game to your outdoor adventures by searching for a geocache. Using a handheld GPS device, navigate to a cache stashed in your area (find them at geocaching.com). Pick up a prize, and leave one of your own.
- Get wet. Splash parks and the local pool are all perfect for helping cool off and being active at the same time.
- Strap on some skates. Adding wheels to outdoor activities almost always makes them more appealing. Outfit everyone with quad or inline roller skates, helmets, and pads.
- Ride a bike. Everyone can go farther when they’re pushing pedals. Besides being an easy mode of transportation, bicycling makes for a fun family outdoor activity.
- Plant a garden. Outdoor family activities don’t always have to be just fun and games. Try putting everyone to work in the garden. Rake, dig, weed, or water. If you don’t have a yard of your own, stroll a farmers market or visit a “you-pick-it” farm.
- Play soccer. While team play requires discipline and cooperation, kicking the ball around in your backyard doesn’t! Practice dribbling, passing, or shooting at a makeshift goal.
- Shoot some hoops. There’s a reason why every school yard and many suburban homes boast a basketball hoop just waiting for action. It’s fun and versatile – you can keep score or just “HORSE” around.
- Set and spike. You don’t need a beach to play volleyball (although that’s, awfully fun, too). A net at your local park or in your backyard works just as well. Some community pools or ball fields even have their own sand courts.