

Physically active kids are much healthier kids

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overweight," is how the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention puts it.

Consider:

• About 16 percent of children are overweight, and that number is rising. Among children age 6 to 10, the percentage of overweight kids more than doubled during a 20-year period ending in 2002. For children age 12 to 19, the overweight rate more than tripled.

• About one-third of high school students do not take part in regular physical activity during a typical week. Even fewer take part in daily gym classes at school, the CDC says.

"I don't think people are really, fully understanding the magnitude of what this means," said Alicia Moag-Stahlberg, executive director for the nonprofit Action for Healthy Kids.

Physical activity helps young people control their weight, reduce blood pressure, lower their risk of diabetes and some kinds of cancer, and gain self-confidence. Exercise is part of a lifestyle of healthy living, along with good nutrition and proper sleep.

This is not just about play time. Getting kids to exercise

is about preventing chronic health problems. The habits established early—good or bad—often last a lifetime.

A 2006 long-term study, financed by the federal government, shows that physical exercise drops off enormously as children move through their teen years into adulthood.

For example, only 6 percent of white females got no exercise in a typical week when they were adolescents. By the time they were young adults, 46 percent got no exercise. The same eroding pattern was true for males and females across all major racial and ethnic groups.

Yet a lot of parents don't see a problem. Polls shows parents believe that a majority of children are in good or excellent health. And it is parents who set the tone for exercise, particularly as the summer nears and the structure of the school day goes away.

So what can they do? Experts say the main suggestion for parents is one they apply in their own lives: make exercise fun, not work. Encourage kids to do what they like to do: soccer, dancing, swimming, jumping rope, skating, even navigating an obstacle course in the backyard.

"If many parents would just go back to the future and

think about what life was like when they were children—from hopscotch to the adventure of climbing trees—it would go a long way toward promoting more physical activity by their kids," said Cedric Bryant, chief exercise physiologist at the American Council on Exercise.

"If you are going to an amusement park, get a lot of walking in," he added. "If you are taking a winter vacation, go cross-country skiing. As a parent, you just have to do more planning—you have to look for ways to sneak in pleasurable physical activities."

Society doesn't always make it easy, federal health officials say. Communities are designed to encourage driving, not walking and biking. Safety concerns have limited the times and places for children to play outside. Schools have shrunk the time kids get for exercise.

However, there are also subtle ways for parents to make a child's daily life more active.

Use the stairs instead of the elevator at the shopping mall. Make a family event out of active chores, like raking leaves. Forget driving the kids if a safe walk will do as well.

As summer approaches, giving at least some structure

to daily exercise becomes even more important, said Moag-Stahlberg, the leader of the healthy kids coalition.

"As corny as it sounds, it really does mean sitting down with the kids and having a family meeting," she said. "How late can the kids stay in bed? How long can the TV be on? How can a parent find out what's going on? If we don't have the discussion, that's even worse."

Children and adolescents should get in at least one hour of physical activity on most days, if not every day, according to the federal government. That 60-minute bloc per day can be broken into periods for kids—10 minutes here, 15 minutes there, Bryant said.

"If you think about it, it's just one hour out of 24," he said. "It really isn't an unreasonable request."

On The Net:
Action for Healthy Kids: <http://www.actionforhealthykids.org>

American Council on Exercise: <http://www.acefitness.org>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov>

Ford Elementary School: <http://www.cobb.k12.ga.us/>

-ford National PTA: http://www.pta.org/parent_resources.html

Communities are designed to encourage driving, not walking and biking. Safety concerns have limited the times and places for children to play outside.

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College grads chase jobs, culture in big cities

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON—More college graduates than ever are flocking to America's big cities, chasing jobs and culture and driving up home prices.

The Associated Press analyzed more than three decades of education data for the largest cities and found that while many have lost population, nearly all have added college graduates.

The findings offer hope for urban areas, many of which have spent decades struggling with financial problems, job losses and high poverty rates.

They also spell trouble for some cities, especially those in the Northeast and Midwest, that have fallen behind places in the South and West in attracting highly educated workers.

"The largest predictor of economic well-being in cities is the percent of college graduates," said Ned Hill, professor of economic development at Cleveland State University. "Cities, in order to remain fiscally viable, have to have a package of goods and services that are attractive to educated people."

In Philadelphia, 20 percent of people age 25 and older had at least a bachelor's degree in 2004, up from just 7 percent in 1970.

Despite the gain, Philadelphia continues to lag other big cities in its share of residents with college degrees. Among the top 21 largest cities, only Detroit, Cleveland and Las Vegas had a smaller share.

In Pittsburgh, just over a third of those 25 and older had at least a bachelor's degree.

Nationally, the figure stood at a little more than a fourth. Some 84 percent had a high school diploma or the equivalent.

By comparison, in 1970 only a bit more than one in 10 adults had bachelor's degrees and about half had high school diplomas.

Seattle was the best-educated city in 2004 with just over half the adults with bachelor's degrees. Following closely were San Francisco, Raleigh, Washington, D.C., and Austin, Texas.

Molly Wankel, who has a doctorate in educational administration, said she moved to the Washington area for a job, and the culture of the city pulled her from the suburbs. Wankel, 51, grew up in eastern Tennessee and works at a company that

develops software and training materials. She recently bought a home in the city.

"I just enjoy walking around looking at the architecture and the way people have renovated these 100-year-old homes," Wankel said. "I love the landscaping and the lovely mix of many races, straight people, gays, singles, older people, younger people."

The AP analyzed census

data from 21 of the largest cities from 1970 to 2004. The AP used 10-year census data from 1970 to 2000, and the Census Bureau's American Community Survey for 2004.

The 21 cities were chosen because of their size and location to provide regional balance. The analysis was expanded for 2004, the latest year for data, to include all 70 cities with a population of 250,000 or more.

The analysis showed that while most states in the Northeast have high percentages of college graduates, their big cities do not. Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Jersey were among the top five states in the percentage of adults with college degrees in 2004.

But Northeast placed no city among the top five, only one from the region—Boston—was in the top 20

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