

The 2018 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

Facts & Tips Sheet

For decades we've heard how physical activity improves heart health, helps maintain healthy body weight, and builds strong bones and muscles in kids. But, what about their brains? For the first time, the *ParticipACTION Report Card* includes an *Expert Statement on Physical Activity and Brain Health in Children and Youth* that highlights the benefits physical activity has on kids' most vital and complex organ – their brain.

The Expert Statement articulates that for better brain health, all children and youth should be physically active on a regular basis, but...

The 2018 ParticipACTION Report Card finds Canadian kids are still not moving enough.

The Report Card grades tell us:

- **D+ for Overall Physical Activity.**
 - Kids aren't active enough. Only 35 per cent of 5- to 17-year-olds and 62 per cent of 3- to 4-year-olds achieve the recommended physical activity levels for their age group.
- **D for Sedentary Behaviours.**
 - Kids are sitting too much, especially in front of screens. Forty-five per cent of 5- to 17-year-olds are meeting the recreational screen time limit of two hours per day. Furthermore, 76 per cent of 3- to 4-year-olds are engaging in more screen time than the one hour per day that is recommended.
- **F for Overall 24-Hour Movement Behaviours.**
 - Kids need to sweat, step, sleep and sit the right amounts each day for optimal health benefits. Only 15 per cent of 5- to 17-year-olds and 13 per cent of 3- to 4-year-olds in Canada meet all these recommendations for their age group.

Without regular physical activity kids could be missing out on these brain benefits:

- **Improved cognition, such as thinking and learning.** For example, students who exercise before a test show stronger brain function than those who don't, and sections of the brain dedicated to memory and learning are larger in active children. Furthermore, being active can boost memory in kids including those with some brain-based disabilities, such as ADHD and autism spectrum disorder.
- **Improved mental health, such as better emotional, psychological and social well-being.** For example, physical activity is an effective tool in alleviating social and academic stress in young people, and active kids have improved self-esteem, which in turn, may lead to better moods and an overall more positive sense of satisfaction with how they perceive themselves.

Engaging kids in daily physical activity may be the most accessible, but underutilized, way to support them to better brain health. Here are 10 tips to help kids get active:

1. **Be active as a family** as it encourages togetherness and connectedness, which are all important for good mental health.
2. **Get kids playing outdoors more** as being outdoors is a powerful antidote for adolescents facing stress.
3. **Explain your child's strengths and needs** to local physical activity and recreation providers so the instructors are better able to include your child in activities.
4. **Avoid removing opportunities for physical activity and outdoor play** as a form of punishment. Movement is vital to their learning development – active kids are more focused and have longer attention spans.
5. **Communicate the benefits physical activity has on brain health** so everyone is better equipped to support children and youth, including those with brain-based disabilities.
6. **If you are a healthcare professional prescribe physical activity** to complement the medical course of treatment for anxiety, depression and ADHD among children and youth.
7. **Educators should teach an active curriculum** by breaking up long periods of sitting to help improve thinking and learning, and bolster kids' resiliency when they are dealing with stress.
8. **Government should make physical activity accessible** for low-income families and families with children with disabilities to increase their participation in sport and physical activity programs.
9. **Support or help create policies that mandate physical activity** during school or childcare hours and ensure educators receive the training required to implement these physical activity programs.
10. **Seek funding opportunities** to support programming for children and youth with disabilities and to create personalized, accepting and respectful play environments for all.

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To download the 2018 ParticipACTION Report Card Highlight Report, including the Expert Statement, or the Full Report, please visit <http://www.participACTION.com/reportcard>

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