

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

14 Bedford Row, London, WC1R 4ED

Tel: 020 7306 1111

Email: pressoffice@csp.org.uk

Web: www.csp.org.uk

PRESS RELEASE

More than a third of children could face an unfit future

Significant numbers of children don't do enough exercise and face poor health as adults, says Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

More than a third of children could face significant health problems in adulthood unless more is done to encourage families to be more active. That's just one of a number of key findings in a new report, ['Fit for the Future - How healthy and active are our children?'](#), published today (23 September) by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP).

At least a third of children are simply not doing enough regular physical activity⁽¹⁾, and approximately a third of children in the UK are overweight or obese⁽²⁾. Regular exercise not only burns calories, it significantly reduces the chances of developing coronary heart disease, stroke and Type 2 diabetes⁽¹⁾. The CSP has discovered that only 1 in 5 parents know how much exercise their children should be taking⁽³⁾ and many parents may be overestimating how active their children actually are.

The CSP report reveals:

- A recent study by researchers at the Universities of Newcastle and Glasgow has suggested that as few as three in every hundred children are actually doing the recommended one hour of physical activity every day⁽⁴⁾.
- Government reports show that about one third of boys and one-third to a half of girls report (inadequate) physical activity levels which may compromise their health⁽¹⁾.
- Approximately one-third of children in the UK aged 2-15 are overweight or obese⁽²⁾.
- Only 1 in 5 parents know how much exercise their children should be taking⁽³⁾.
- Parents think their children get around two and a half hours exercise per day, when in fact they are physically active for less than 30 minutes⁽⁴⁾.
- 83 per cent of parents are unaware that physical inactivity in childhood can increase the risk of cancer in later life⁽⁵⁾.

Commenting on the report findings, Liz Cavan, Chair of Council at the CSP, said:

“Physiotherapists are very concerned that as a society we are unknowingly putting children at risk of obesity and the development of life-threatening illnesses because people aren't sufficiently aware of the role and importance of physical activity in preserving good health.

“The growth of sedentary leisure activities, the 'car culture', time and financial constraints on busy working parents and our increasing fears about letting young children run around outdoors without adult supervision, have all contributed to the problem”, suggests Ms Cavan.

Healthy School Days – expert advice for parents and teachers

The CSP's analysis of statistics from the National Child Measurement Programme 2007/08⁽⁶⁾ reveals that 10 per cent of children in England are obese when they begin their formal education at school. By the time they are ready to move up to secondary school, the number of children who are obese has nearly doubled to 18.3 per cent.

To help parents and teachers get young children's health back on track, the CSP has teamed up with the British Dietetic Association (BDA) to roll out a number of **Healthy School Days** at primary schools across the UK, marking the launch of its ['Move for Health Kids'](#) campaign. The events will see teams of chartered physiotherapists and dietitians visiting schools to provide expert advice to parents and teachers on exercise and nutrition.

Liz Cavan said: "The National Child Measurement Programme figures show there is a major leap in the number of children becoming obese during their very first years of education. It is during these early years that we form the habits that we stick with for life. This is why physiotherapists are focussing efforts towards parents with children of primary school age. We hope that sharing our expertise in a friendly and fun environment will encourage kids to increase their physical activity, choose healthier food options and shape good habits to carry through their lives."

The CSP recognises the importance of a balanced diet as part of a healthy lifestyle, so it has joined forces with the BDA for them to provide expert nutrition advice and tips. Jessica Williams, of the British Dietetic Association's Paediatric Specialist Group said: "We know that good nutrition in childhood gives children the best start in life. Move for Health Kids is an opportunity for us to really highlight how easy it can be to make small changes and encourage children and their families to make better healthier food choices and increase their activity levels."

To aid parents in helping their children meet their target of 60 minutes of activity per day, chartered physiotherapists suggest breaking activity down into more manageable 10-15 min chunks. The CSP and the BDA have produced a new **FREE 'Fit for the Future' leaflet**, packed with simple, professional advice to help families and teachers build more physical activity and healthy eating into kids' daily routines (see note 4). The Dairy Council, safefood Northern Ireland and Kellogg's have supported the Campaign.

"Don't just use the park for a picnic, do something active too, like throwing a frisbee, flying a kite, or kicking a ball around. Planned exercise like swimming at your local pool can also be fun. The Government is supporting a range of initiatives to help families fit in more exercise, so parents should check their local authority website to find out what's available in their area and see what's free to enjoy," Liz Cavan suggests.

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. For further information please call the CSP press office on 020 7306 1111. Out of hours please call Jennie Edmondson, CSP head of press and PR, on 07786 332197 or Becky Darke, CSP media relations officer, on 07900 160349. Media enquiries for the BDA should be directed to the media hotline on 0870 850 2517 or pr@bda.uk.com

2. The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) is the professional, educational and trade union body for the UK's 48,000 chartered physiotherapists, physiotherapy assistants and physiotherapy students. For previous press releases, visit www.csp.org.uk

3. The British Dietetic Association (BDA), founded in 1936, is the professional association for registered dietitians in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is the nation's largest organisation of food and nutrition professionals with nearly 6,000 members. About two-thirds of members are employed in the National Health Service. The remaining members work in education, industry, research, sport settings or freelance. For further details about the BDA, including factsheets on healthy eating for children, please visit www.bda.uk.com

4. Download a free PDF version of 'Fit for the Future' at http://www.csp.org.uk/director/members/libraryandpublications/csppublications.cfm?item_id=03CCF398BA1D65ED7E0CB37C04A5591D or call the CSP on 0207 306 6666 to order a free paper copy.

Bulk copies of 'Fit for the Future' can be ordered online at http://www.csp.org.uk/uploads/documents/csp_fftf_orderform_aug09.doc

Notes and references

(1) Department of Health (2004). *At least five a week. Evidence of the impact of physical activity and its relationship to health. A report from the Chief Medical Officer.* London.

(2) The NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care. *Statistics on Obesity, Physical Activity and Diet in England, February 2009.*

Childhood BMI Statistics <http://www.isdscotland.org/isd/3640.html>

Welsh Assembly Government (June 2006). *In Perspective. Food and Fitness.* Crown.

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (January 2007). *Northern Ireland Health And Social Wellbeing Survey 2005/06 Topline Results - Childhood Obesity.*

(3) Survey was conducted by Opinium Research for the CSP through an online poll of 2,084 British adults between 9 and 14 April 2009. Results have been weighted to nationally representative criteria.

(4) Newcastle University website. (10 September 2008). 'Children's physical activity levels hugely overestimated'. <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/press.office/press.release/item/1221052075>

(5) British Heart Foundation website. (23 January 2009). *Parents unaware couch potato lifestyle risks their children's future health.* <http://www.bhf.org.uk/>

(6) The NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care. (December 2008). *National Child Measurement Programme. 2007/08 School Year Headline Results.* London. The NHS Information Centre.

Move for Health – the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy's plan to get children moving

Move for Health is a partner of 'Change4Life' – the nationwide movement to help everyone eat well, move more and live longer. Visit www.nhs.uk/change4Life or call 0300 123 4567 for more information. In Wales CSP's 'Move for Health' campaign is in support of 'Health Challenge Wales'. In Scotland "Move for Health" supports the 'Take Life On, One Step at a Time' campaign, and in Northern Ireland 'Move for Health' support the 'Get a life, get active' campaign.

Recommended levels of exercise

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, in line with the Chief Medical Officer, recommends that children and young people should have at least one hour of moderate intensity physical exercise every day. Moderate intensity means that children's heart and breathing rates should increase, but conversation should still be possible. Exercise should be varied to enable children to use different muscles, improve their bone health and develop flexibility. Exercise can involve planned sports activities at school but also includes play during school breaks or at home; walking to and from school, swimming or games etc.