

Team Sports Help Teens Stay Fit

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Active teens are healthy teens, but some kinds of activities may be better than others. New research published Monday in the journal *Pediatrics* suggests that team sports may be better at keeping kids' weight down than biking or walking to school.

Study authors from Dartmouth College looked at the influence sports, physical education and commuting to school had on adolescents and their weight.

Investigators surveyed more than 1,700 high school students by phone and asked them how much they participated in team sports, what other forms of physical activity they were involved in and their height and weight.

The study found those kids who played on three or more sports teams in a year, were 27% less likely to be overweight, and 39% less likely to be obese than those teens who did not play team sports. They also found biking or walking to school had less of an effect on a student's weight - although it did reduce their likelihood of being obese.

"We estimated that the prevalence of obesity would decrease by 22% if all adolescents walked or biked to school four to five days per week," said Keith Drake, a Postdoctoral Research Fellow with the Hood Center for Children and Families at the Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth.

Drake's research also found that P.E. classes for teens seemed to have little effect on their weight.

"Active commuting was not associated with a lower risk of being overweight, which suggests that it may be protective only for adolescents who are already overweight or obese. We were surprised by this finding, as previous studies of active travel have failed to detect an inverse relationship with weight status."

Researchers believe playing high school sports, which usually involve regular practices and competitions, reduces a child's chances of having a weight problem because of the strenuous

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and consistent workouts. Therefore, study authors conclude, increasing a child's opportunity to play sports, even if they are not gifted athletes, should be a priority, especially for teens and children entering middle school or high school.

“Increasing sport participation in adolescents who do not play sports, are not athletic, or just not competitive may be challenging,” Drake acknowledged. “Because our estimates suggest that increasing sports participation among these adolescents would lead to the largest reduction in obesity, expanding non-competitive athletic opportunities, such as club sports and intramurals, should be prioritized.”