

Childhood inactivity – a public health priority

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The continuing epidemic of cardiovascular diseases (CVD) calls for renewed and intensified public health action to prevent heart disease and stroke. The widespread occurrence and silent progression of atherosclerosis has created a CVD burden that is massive in terms of its attendant death, disability, and social and economic costs. Atherosclerosis begins to develop in childhood and progresses into the adult years, under strong influence of the risk factors. Recent studies of children, adolescents, and young adults have demonstrated the close link of blood cholesterol level, blood pressure level, smoking, physical inactivity and obesity with the extent and severity of atherosclerosis among people well below age. These findings underscore the opportunities for preventing CVD during childhood and adolescence, as well as the lifelong importance of prevention. For most children, atherosclerotic vascular changes are minor and can be minimized or even prevented with adherence to a healthy lifestyle. Accordingly, participation of children in sports and active play has never been more crucial than it is today. Furthermore, beside the beneficial role of physical activity in delaying or preventing metabolic complications such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension and consequently cardiovascular diseases, it has also been shown that it improves bone mineral density, increase school performance, and have a positive effect on mental health.

As a confirmation of exceptional public health importance of physical inactivity in adult age and children nowadays, the World Health Organisation (WHO) Member States in resolution 66.10 have agreed on a voluntary global non-communicable disease target for a reduction of 10% in physical inactivity by 2025. In order to achieve those objectives, it is necessary to guide relevant scientific research and implement the results in effective strategies that can lead to improved cardiovascular health of the population.

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