State Policies Mandating Physical Education and Recess Associated With Increase In Overall In-School Physical Activity Among Children

State and school district-level policies mandating minimum requirements for in-school physical education and recess time are associated with increased odds of schools in those states and districts meeting physical activity recommendations for students, according to a report published by Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine (1).

"Children spend the majority of their waking hours in school, thus schools are important locations to focus obesity prevention activities, such as increasing physical activity opportunities," the authors write as background information in the article. "The national recommendation for school physical education [PE] — endorsed by the National Association of Sports and Physical Education (NASPE) and the American Heart Association — is that elementary school students be offered at least 150 minutes/week of PE. However, fewer than 20 percent of third grade students in the United States were offered this amount during the 2007-2008 school year."

Sandy J. Slater, Ph.D., and colleagues with the University of Illinois at Chicago, examined the association between state and local school district-level policies requiring or recommending minimum requirements for in-school physical activity and the odds that elementary schools within those states and districts meet the levels of physical activity recommended, with an

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emphasis on physical education and recess. The authors collected data on existing state PE and recess-related laws and collected data at the local school level through mail-back surveys that included questions on the number of days per week and number of minutes for which PE class was scheduled during a typical week for a third grade student. The study sample included 47 states, 690 districts and 1,761 schools, during the 2006-2007 through 2008-2009 school years.

The authors found that approximately 70 percent of schools included in the analysis offered at least 20 minutes of daily recess, and 17.9 percent offered 150 minutes/week of physical education. The majority of states (83 percent) had no daily recess law and less than half had some kind of law addressing the recommended 150 minutes/week of physical education. The authors found that the odds of schools meeting the NASPE recommendation for physical activity increased if they were located in states or school districts having a law requiring 150 minutes/week of physical education.

Schools in states with policies encouraging daily recess had higher odds of having 20 minutes of recess daily, however district policies were not significantly associated with school-level recess practices. The authors also found that adequate physical education time was inversely associated with recess, with schools offering at least 150 minutes/week of physical education being 50 percent less likely to meet recommendations on recess time. Additionally, schools with students of predominantly white race/ethnicity were more likely than all other racial/ethnic groups to have daily recess, and schools with the highest number of students receiving free or reduced-cost lunch were less likely to have 20 minutes of recess daily.

“Our results show that mandating only increased physical education or recess time does not result in more overall physical activity as schools and/or districts appear to compensate for any increased physical activity in one area by decreasing other physical activity opportunities,” the authors conclude. “By mandating physical education or recess, policy makers can effectively increase school-based physical activity opportunities for youth.”

Reference:

Removing Sugar-Sweetened Beverages from Schools Associated With Reduced Access To, But Not Consumption of These Beverages Among Adolescents

State policies banning all sugar-sweetened beverages in schools are associated with reduced in-school access and purchase of these beverages, however these policies are not associated with a reduction in overall consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, according to a report published by Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine (1).

"In the past 25 years, sources of energy intake among youth have shifted toward greater consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, such as soda, sports drinks, and high-calorie fruit drinks," the authors write as background information in the study. "The Institute of Medicine recommended that all sugar-sweetened beverages be banned in schools, but many state competitive food policies have focused primarily on soda while allowing sports drinks, fruit drinks and other sugar-sweetened beverages."

Daniel R. Taber, Ph.D., M.P.H., and colleagues from the University of Illinois at Chicago, examined state policies that banned all sugar-sweetened beverages in schools compared with states that banned only soda or had no beverage policy for in-school purchases to determine whether these policies were associated with reduced in-school sugar-sweetened beverages access and purchasing. The authors also sought to determine if these policies were associated with reduced overall consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages among adolescents. The analysis included 6,900 students from public schools in 40 states, who were sampled during their fifth and eighth grade years (Spring 2004 and 2007, respectively) and had completed questionnaires about their in-school access to and purchase of sugar-sweetened beverages, as well as their overall consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages. The authors found that the proportion of students who reported in-school sugar-sweetened beverage access and purchasing were similar in states that banned only soda (66.6 percent and 28.9 percent) compared with states with no beverage policy (66.6 percent and 26 percent, respectively).

Overall, sugar-sweetened beverage consumption was not associated with state policy as the authors found that in each policy category, approximately 85 percent of students reported consuming sugar-sweetened beverages at least once in the past seven days, and 26 percent to 33 percent of students reported daily consumption. Additional analysis indicated that overall consumption had only a modest association with in-school sugar-sweetened beverage access.

"To summarize, state policies regulating beverages sold in middle schools were associated with reduced in-school sugar-sweetened beverage access and purchasing only if they banned all sugar-sweetened beverages," the authors write. "Access and purchasing were equivalent in states that..."

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banned only soda compared with those with no policy at all. However, even comprehensive sugar-sweetened beverage policies were not associated with overall consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, which was largely independent of students' in-school sugar-sweetened beverage access."

"Our study adds to a growing body of literature that suggests that to be effective, school-based policy interventions must be comprehensive," the authors conclude. "States that only ban soda, while allowing other beverages with added caloric sweeteners, appear to be no more successful at reducing adolescents' sugar-sweetened beverage access and purchasing within school than states that take no action at all."

Reference:


**Stress Reduction and Mindful Eating Curb Weight Gain Among Overweight Women**

Many dread gaining weight during the holiday season, but there may be hope for those who find that stress causes them to reach for yet another helping of holiday goodies.

In a study by UCSF researchers published online in the *Journal of Obesity*, mastering simple mindful eating and stress-reduction techniques helped prevent weight gain even without dieting (1).

Women in the study who experienced the greatest reduction in stress tended to have the most loss of deep belly fat. To a greater degree than fat that lies just under the skin, this deep abdominal fat is associated with an elevated risk for developing heart disease or diabetes.

"You're training the mind to notice, but to not automatically react based on habitual patterns — to not reach for a candy bar in response to feeling anger, for example," said UCSF researcher Jennifer Daubenmier, Ph.D., from the Osher Center for Integrative Medicine. If you can first recognize what you are feeling before you act, you have a greater chance of making a wiser decision."

Daubenmier led the current study with UCSF psychologist Elissa Epel, Ph.D.. The study, published online in October, is part of ongoing UCSF research into how stress and the stress hormone cortisol are linked to eating behavior, fat and health.

The women who participated were not on calorie-counting diets. Instead, 24 of the 47 chronically stressed, overweight and obese women were randomly assigned to mindfulness training and practice, and the other 23 served as a control group. Although no diets were prescribed, all participants attended one session about the basics of healthy eating and exercise.

The training included nine weekly sessions, each lasting 2 1/2 hours, during which the women learned stress reduction techniques and how to be more aware of their eating by recognizing bodily sensations — including hunger, fullness and taste satisfaction. At week six they attended an intensive seven-hour, silent meditation retreat.

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They were asked to set aside 30 minutes daily for meditation exercises and to practice mindful eating during meals. Researchers used a scientifically tested survey to gauge psychological stress before and after the four-month study, and recorded the women’s fat and cortisol levels.

The UCSF researchers looked for changes in the amount of deep abdominal fat and overall weight. They also measured secretion of cortisol shortly after awakening, a time when cortisol peaks in those under chronic stress.

Cortisol secretion runs in a daily cycle and normally ramps up when we awaken. But secretion also is triggered by both real and perceived threats. If we wake up, anticipate the day’s events, and experience these thoughts as stressful, cortisol secretion may spike even higher, Daubenmier said.

Among women in the treatment group, changes in body awareness, chronic stress, cortisol secretion and abdominal fat were clearly linked. Those who had greater improvements in listening to their bodies’ cues, or greater reductions in stress or cortisol, experienced the greatest reductions in abdominal fat.

Among the subset of obese women in the study, those who received the mindfulness training had significant reductions in cortisol after awakening and also maintained their total body weight, compared to women in the waitlist group, who had stable cortisol levels and continued to gain weight.

The stress-reduction and mindful-eating techniques used in the study were adapted from methods developed three decades ago by Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D., the first director of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School and a founding member of the Cambridge Zen Center. The mindful-eating techniques used in the UCSF study are part of a larger program of mindful eating developed by Jean Kristeller, Ph.D., of Indiana State University.

“In this study we were trying to cultivate people’s ability to pay attention to their sensations of hunger, fullness and taste satisfaction as a guide for limiting how much they eat,” Daubenmier said. “We tried to reduce eating in response to emotions or external cues that typically drive overeating behavior.”

Daubenmier said the small study is preliminary and must be confirmed in ongoing, follow-up research. Furthermore, when the entire study group was included in the analysis — overweight as well as obese women — the researchers found no significant differences in weight change between women who practiced stress reduction and mindful eating and those on the waiting list.

In a separate, ongoing study with lower-income, pregnant women who are overweight, Epel, Daubenmier and colleagues are teaching similar mindful-eating techniques. Pregnancy is a time when heavy women tend to gain an excessive amount of weight and later find it very hard to lose it. Furthermore, excessive weight gain during pregnancy can harm the baby’s health.

“We are intervening at a critical point, when the health of the next generation is being shaped,” Epel said. “We hope to improve the health of both the mothers and their babies.”

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Reference:


Short Walk Cuts Chocolate Consumption in Half

A 15-minute walk can cut snacking on chocolate at work by half, according to research by the University of Exeter. The study showed that, even in stressful situations, workers eat only half as much chocolate as they normally would after this short burst of physical activity.

Published in the journal Appetite, the research suggests that employees may find that short breaks away from their desks can help keep their minds off snacking.

In the study, 78 regular chocolate-eaters were invited to enter a simulated work environment, after two days abstinence from chocolate snacking. Two groups were asked to take a brisk 15-minute walk on a treadmill and were then given work to complete at a desk. One group was given an easy, low-stress task, while the other was asked to complete a more demanding job. The other two groups were asked to have a rest before completing the same tasks as the first two groups. Again, half were given an easier task and the remainder a more challenging one. Chocolate was available in a bowl on the desk for all participants as they carried out their work.

Those who had exercised before working consumed on average half the amount of chocolate as the others: around 15 grams, compared with 28 grams. 15 grams is equivalent to a small ‘treat size’ or ‘fun size’ chocolate bar.

The difficulty of the task made no difference in the amount of chocolate they ate, which suggests that stress did not contribute to their cravings for sweet snacks.

Lead researcher Professor Adrian Taylor of Sport and Health Sciences at the University of Exeter said: “We know that snacking on high calorie foods, like chocolate, at work can become a mindless habit and can lead to weight gain over time. We often feel that these snacks give us an energy boost, or help us deal with the stress of our jobs, including boredom. People often find it difficult to cut down on their daily treats but this study shows that by taking a short walk, they are able to regulate their intake by half.”

Exercise is known to have significant benefits for mood and energy levels and has potential for managing addictions. Professor Taylor and his colleagues at the University of Exeter have previously shown that exercise can curb cravings for chocolate but this is the first study to show a reduction in consumption.

Reference:

Body’s Fat Switch Discovered

Scientists at Warwick Medical School have made an important discovery about the mechanism controlling the body’s ‘fat switch’, shedding new light on our understanding of how proteins regulate appetite control and insulin secretion.

This research, led by Professor Victor Zammit, Head of Metabolic and Vascular Health at Warwick Medical School, found that the enzyme known as ‘Carnitine palmitoyltransferase 1A’ (CPT1) has a switch which is thrown depending on the composition and curvature of its cellular membrane. This is the first time such a mechanism has been described and may possibly be unique, reflecting the importance of this protein to cellular function.

CPT1 is the key protein that regulates fatty acid oxidation in the liver and is critical for metabolism. Its activity determines whether individuals suffer from fatty liver in one extreme or ketosis in the other.

Professor Zammit explained: “Knowing that the CPT1 enzyme can switch and what controls it will ultimately lead to a better understanding of why some people appear to have a speedy metabolism and others struggle to curb their appetite.

“We are making great inroads to understanding the science behind our metabolism and how at the cellular level it changes according to the influence of different factors – be they nutritional or hormonal.”

The importance of this work on clinical practice is that, having discovered the molecular mechanism, it should now be possible to design drugs that flick the switch of CPT1 in one way or the other, depending on the requirements of individual patients and the tissue that needs to be affected. For example, drugs can be developed for patients suffering from diabetic keto acidosis, a condition when insufficient insulin caused the body to start breaking down fat, so that the enzyme is inhibited to oxidize fewer fatty acids.

“This would be a major breakthrough in tackling the obesity crisis we now face,” added Professor Zammit.

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- Children Skip the Fat If Dads Aren’t Lenient
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- Overall Quality Of Pregnant Woman’s Diet Affects Risk For Two Types Of Birth Defects, Study Shows
- Study Finds Familiarity Increases The Fullness That Children Expect From Snack Foods
- To Ditch Dessert, Feed The Brain
- Removing Suger-Sweetened Beverages from Schools Associated With Reduced Access to, But Not Consumption of These Beverages Among Adolescents
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