

Editorial

Joav Merrick

Physical activity: start at a younger age

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Introduction

It has been shown that regular physical activity is good for health to improve fitness and help reduce the risk of certain diseases and chronic disability (1).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has published guidelines for physical activity for different age groups (1), which can be helpful to use and follow. Physical activity means movement of the body that utilizes energy and can involve many activities from light and moderate to vigorous. Moderate and vigorous activities that increase heart rate are needed to provide health benefits.

Physical activity in adults 50 years and older

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention analyzed data on adults aged 50 years and older from the 2014 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) in order to look at the prevalence of physical inactivity (2). This survey system is a state-based, random-digit-dialed telephone survey of the noninstitutionalized people over the age of 18 years in the United States. In this survey, data were collected from 304,129 adults aged 50 years and older from 50 states and the District of Columbia.

They found that overall, 27.5% of adults aged 50 years and older (about 31 million people in the United States) reported no physical activity, with the inactivity increasing with increasing age. Physical inactivity was 25.4% between 50 and 64 years, 26.9% between 65 and 74 years and 35.3% for people 75 years and older. Looking at gender differences, it was found that physical inactivity was higher among females than males and also higher among Hispanics and non-Hispanic Blacks than among non-Hispanic Whites. Inactivity was also increasing with lower levels of education and higher body mass index (2). Inactivity was also observed in people with chronic disease (stroke, coronary heart disease, arthritis, cancer, diabetes, chronic

obstructive lung disease and depressive disorders). By age group, the prevalence of inactivity for adults with at least one chronic disease compared with those with no disease was 30.9% vs. 18.1% between 50 and 64 years, 29.6% vs. 19.2% between 65 and 74 years and 37.3% vs. 26.8% for adults 75 years and older.

Physical activity in teenagers and young adults

Concerning teenagers and younger adults, several studies have also found a decline in physical activity. A comparative study (3) among high school students that occurred in parallel in the United States and Canada showed a steady decline in physical activity between 14 and 18 years of age. While the pattern of decline was shown to be similar, the decline was stronger among American adolescents.

We need to start earlier and maintain physical activity through the ages

Both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (4) and the World Health Organization (5) already recommend a level of at least 60 min of physical activity per day at the age of 6–17 years, but studies have shown that this recommendation is only reached by a small percentage of teenagers (4).

Schools and communities, therefore, need to be more involved to increase and facilitate physical activity among children and adolescents and find ways to maintain activity also into adulthood in order to increase the benefits for the individual and the community.

References

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Joav Merrick, Medical Director, Health Services, Division for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services, POBox 1260, IL-91012 Jerusalem, Israel, E-mail: jmerrick@zahav.net.il