

Kids worldwide are less fit than their parents, a study says

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Second-graders at Brookdale Elementary School run laps around the gym during a physical education class instructed by a YMCA staff member in Parkland, Wash., on Jan. 3, 2012. Photo: Janet Jensen/Tacoma News Tribune/MCT

DALLAS — Today's kids can't keep up with their parents. Millions of kids from around the world were studied. Researchers found that kids today don't run as fast or as far as their parents did when they were young.

It takes kids today 90 seconds longer to run a mile than it took children 30 years ago.

"It makes sense. We have kids that are less active than before," said Dr. Stephen Daniels, a University of Colorado pediatrician.

The research was presented at the American Heart Association's yearly gathering.

Data From 1964 To 2010

The study was led by Grant Tomkinson, who studies the science of exercise at the University of South Australia. His research involved 25 million children from 28 countries. They ranged in age from 9 to 17. His team looked at how far and fast children run. Running is a good measure of a person's heart health. The information he looked at spanned from 1964 to 2010.

Tomkinson measured how far each child could run in 5 to 15 minutes. He also measured how quickly they ran a certain distance ranging from a half-mile to 2 miles.

He found that today's kids are about 15 percent less fit than their parents were. This study is the first to show that children's fitness has worsened worldwide over the last 30 years.

Tomkinson said that for both boys and girls of all ages, fitness levels have decreased.

Fitness experts say that children 6 and older should get at least one hour of exercise daily. The exercise should be tough enough to make a person's heart beat fast and body sweat. Currently, only one-third of American kids are getting that much exercise.

Tomkinson and Daniels said that weight has likely played a role in the decreasing heart health of youth. This is especially true in the United States. One-tenth of children in the United States are obese, or dangerously [overweight \(https://www.newsela.com/?tag=obesity\)](https://www.newsela.com/?tag=obesity). Being very overweight makes it harder to run or do any aerobic exercise.

Television and video games may also be part of the problem, they said. Some kids may live in unsafe neighborhoods where they cannot freely use playgrounds or ball fields, they added.

"Kids aren't getting enough opportunities to build up that activity over the course of the day," Daniels said. "Many schools, for (money) reasons, don't have any physical education at all. Some rely on recess" to provide exercise.

A Lack Of Exercise

Sam Kass is a chef at the White House. He also helps first lady Michelle Obama with her Let's Move program. The first lady started the program in February 2010 to promote healthy food and exercise.

Kass spoke out about today's children and their inactivity. He said schools have to get involved. Today's generation of children are the least active in U.S. history, he said.

For children living in Europe, Australia and New Zealand the drop in fitness levels does not appear to be getting worse.

In China things are different. Studies show that young Chinese students have become slower and heavier over the years.

Research shows that male college students in China have gotten slower. A short distance run took male runners 14 to 15 seconds longer than it took male runners in 2000. Female students slowed by about 12 seconds in running an even shorter distance.

Experts say Chinese students have to spend too much time cramming for college-entrance exams. They also blame the spread of indoor entertainment, such as web surfing and video games.

In Japan, children's physical fitness had been declining since the 1980s. To turn that around the government reached out to cities, towns and schools. It urged them to promote youth fitness. Motoaki Nito, from Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology said it helped Japanese children slowly build more strength. Today's Japanese children are not as strong as they were in the 1980s, but they are not getting weaker, Nito said.

Information from the World Health Organization show that 80 percent of young people around the world may not be getting enough exercise.

Quiz

- 1 Chinese students are not getting enough exercise for all of the following reasons EXCEPT:
 - (A) They are unable to participate in sporting activities.
 - (B) They are too busy studying for tests to get into college.
 - (C) They are spending too much time playing games indoors.
 - (D) They spend too much time on the Internet surfing the web.

- 2 According to the article, all the following are true EXCEPT:
 - (A) Eighty percent of young people do not get enough exercise.
 - (B) Michelle Obama created the Let's Move program.
 - (C) Kids six and up need an hour of exercise per day.
 - (D) Girls are less fit than boys.

- 3 By what percentage has children's fitness decreased from their parents' fitness?
 - (A) 5 percent
 - (B) 10 percent
 - (C) 15 percent
 - (D) 25 percent

- 4 Select the paragraph from the article that provides the MOST evidence that being overweight is unhealthy.

Answer Key

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Paragraph 9:

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