

Parents' physical inactivity influences children

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Children are more likely to watch high levels of television if their parents do, but parents do not need to be physically active to help their children to be active, a new study has found.

The paper, Parent and child physical activity and sedentary time: Do active [parents](#) foster active [children](#)? by Dr Russell Jago and colleagues in the Department of Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences at the University of Bristol is published online in [BMC Public Health](#). The study has been funded by a grant from the British Heart Foundation.

Among children and adolescents, physical activity has been associated with a lower BMI and a reduced risk of [heart disease](#). Regular physical activity is also known to help to prevent the development of [type 2 diabetes](#), obesity and some cancers and is also associated with improved mental well-being.

The study found that higher parental [TV viewing](#) was associated with an increased risk of high levels of TV viewing for both boys and girls. For girls, the relative risk of watching more than four hours of TV per day was 3.67 times higher if the girl's parent watched two-four hours of TV per day, when compared to girls who watched less than two hours of TV per day.

For boys, the relative risk of watching more than four hours of TV per day was 10.47 times higher if the boy's parent watched more than four hours of TV per day when compared to boys who watched less than two hours of TV per day. There were no associations between the time that parents and children spend engaged in physical activity.

Dr Russ Jago, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences, said: "Physical activity has many positive effects on children's health while TV viewing has been associated with adverse health outcomes. Many

children do not meet physical activity recommendations and exceed TV viewing guidelines.

"Our research suggests that parents do not need to be active for their children to be active. Parents should therefore look at ways in which they can help to facilitate physical activity for their children such as by encouraging walking to school or promoting outdoor free-play in safe areas close to home."

Dr Mike Knapton, Associate Medical Director at the BHF said: "Parents and children rooted to the sofa watching over four hours of television each night paints a worrying picture of kids' daily habits.

"Ideally parents and children should lead an active lifestyle together but if this isn't possible then parents need to take charge and ensure a healthier way of life for the next generation. It's time to switch off the box and get the nation's kids moving again."

Year six children and their parents were recruited from 40 primary schools in Bristol to participate in the study to examine parents and children's physical activity patterns. Parental and child physical activity and inactive time was assessed using accelerometers. These are small devices that provide accurate and reliable indices of physical activity among both children and adults.

The study is part of a larger project, the Bristol 3Ps Project, which examines the influences of peers and parents on physical activity participation in 10-11 year old children.

Provided by University of Bristol

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