



TEEN GIRLS CAN BE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE...AND STILL BE COOL!

Related reading

► [Canada's physical activity guides for children and youth](#)

► [Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity](#)

► [On the move.](#)

"We can change our image, we can better it for ourselves. We can get more friends, be more popular, and be "cool." What is the best way to do all of these things at once? By doing physical activity. By participating in physical activity, you can have lots of fun, forget about all your worries, and throw them all away, at least when you're participating in sports or jogging or walking. You don't really think about any of your problems, all you really think about is what you are doing at the moment..."

Why is physical activity so important for teenage girls?

Physical activity is important for everybody, including all teenagers, but especially for girls who are generally less active than boys the same age. The teen years can be busy - socially, at home, and at school, and they can be fun, but they are also demanding and sometimes demoralizing. There are issues such as body image, the onset of menstruation, and general feelings of insecurity about the changing body in these years. For girls it is really important to balance the demands made on them and to look after themselves physically and emotionally. This includes participating in physical activity.

Practical tips on how to get girls active

The Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sport has a program called On the Move, which has as its objective "to increase the participation of girls and women in all aspects of Canadian sport and physical activity."

They list their [Top 10 On the Move Success Factors](#) as:

1. Fun
2. A mix of physical and social activities
3. Input into program design
4. Girls and women only
5. A safe and supportive environment
6. Peer age groupings
7. Basic skill development
8. Role model leader
9. Food!
10. Choice of clothing and music

Exercise can be another way of meeting people and making friends.

For Parents:

- Be a role model - don't just watch, be active yourself - go for a swim, walk, play tennis.
- Provide support - offer to drive your daughter (and her friend) to the waterpark.
- But... avoid putting too much pressure on your daughter (to participate or perform) - you may put her off completely.

The factors that make physical activity so important**Health**

Girls can build up or 'bank' bone mass up to the age of 30 years. It is important to build bones early in life to minimize the chance of osteoporosis later. Weight bearing exercises (activities in which your body works against gravity or resistance, such as jogging, walking, dancing, or playing soccer) and a healthy diet (e.g., calcium rich food sources) are particularly important for bone health. With the trend towards children and youth becoming less active and eating "junk food" there has been an increase in the incidence of diabetes in younger people, in Canada as well as elsewhere.

Weight management

Being physically active is an important factor in achieving and maintaining a healthy weight. Being overweight or underweight and/or suffering from eating disorders can create health problems such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, as well as self-esteem problems, including those related to body image.

Body image

"When a girl looks into the mirror and sees a body she does not want to see all she has to do is WALK away from it."

Girls are very aware of changes to their bodies during the teenage years. If they are comfortable with their physical skills and abilities they will have a better self image and better morale.

Morale

Depression, shyness and insecurity can be improved by being physically active - but not necessarily in a competitive environment. Coaches who are critical or determined to win at all costs can cause some girls to drop out of sports, whereas a less competitive and more relaxed approach provides opportunities for activity that is social.

Social

Exercise can be another way of meeting people and making friends. Many girls make friends playing tennis, at the swimming pool, playing volleyball at the beach.

This article was prepared by the [Alberta Centre for Active Living](http://www.centre4activeliving.ca). It can be found at www.centre4activeliving.ca/publications/chn/feature-articles/.

Production of this material has been made possible through a financial contribution from the Public Health Agency of Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Public Health Agency of Canada.

Last reviewed/updated: December 10, 2007

Activity ideas for teen girls

"Girls don't try in front of guys because they think it will ruin their image. But when they see another girl showing off their talent and being able to hold their own and being admired by the guys they realize that it is good to compete."

- Sports e.g. soccer, tennis, baseball, basketball - at school, or local parks and recreation programs, or competitive - for the social aspects as well as the physical activity.
- Social outings can be active - try bowling, or paintball, or ice skating, instead of always going to movies or malls.
- Walking, jogging - with friends, walking the dog.
- Join a gym.
- Look for interesting new activities to try - consider doing a class in yoga, pilates, belly-dancing, self-defence, trampolining or break dancing.
- Do what you enjoy!