

fit4future: a school program to make Swiss kids move more!

BJSM – Swiss Junior Doctors and Undergraduate Perspective on Sport and Exercise Medicine Blog Series

This article first appeared on the BJSM Blog (link: <https://blogs.bmj.com/bjasm/2018/11/09/fit4future-a-school-program-to-make-swiss-kids-move-more/>) on November 9, 2018.

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Introduction

Overweight and obesity are major issues of the 21st century. In Switzerland, almost one in five children is overweight or obese [1]. The causes are complex and multifactorial however, low level of physical activity and unhealthy nutrition represent one part of the problem [2]. This issue must be dealt with attention as overweight and physical inactivity can lead to poor health condition and metabolic diseases. Initiatives should allow children to live a healthy life and therefore, prevent the many consequences of overweight. In order to achieve this goal, school has an important role to play.

What is fit4future?

Since 2005, fit4future has been taking place in Switzerland and allows more than 150 000 primary school children to take part in the program [3]. The goals are to make children more active, reduce overweight and promote health. The program includes three main fields: physical activity, nutrition and brain gym.

Schools are invited to join for free. School teachers get trained twice a year and organize the program within the school. The school receives a red box of playing and sport equipment, aiming to support children moving during play-



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time. Schools can also organize workshops with health experts and participate in activity days to discover new sports and games. Parents are encouraged to participate in events about selected topics in one of the main fields (physical activity, nutrition and brain gym). Their participation greatly influences and encourages children's education and healthy lifestyle.

Research and scientific support

The program is supported by national competence centers (Sport, Physical Activity and Health Department of University of Basel, Swiss Nutrition Society, and Promotion Santé Suisse (French for Swiss Health Promotion)). These centers provide quality, improvement and evaluate the program's benefits. The program seems to be effective this far: an evaluation showed an increase in physical activity of approximately 20 minutes per week for children participating in fit4future (not published).

Teacher's opinion

School is not only a place where children learn how to read and calculate, but it must also promote health, and teach children to live healthy. This is the reason why Sophie*, a school teacher from the lovely Canton of Jura in Switzerland, decided to join the program last year. While Sophie has always been active and knows the importance of physical activity in the development of children, she wanted to teach them to move and have fun. Through the program, she tries to make daily lessons more active. For example, after a while sitting and working on math problems, she asks children to stop and make them do some exercise for a few minutes. Sometimes, they go outside to do some specific coordination and balance exercises, and other times, they simply stand up and hop from one foot to the other in the classroom. After this little break, children go back to work. The teacher supports that it is not a waste of time. After a long time of learning, children need to move, and moving helps to concentrate. Sophie and her class have participated in the program for a few months and she can observe positive outcomes from these little breaks. A child told her "how good it feels" afterwards.

Endurance is not for children, really?

The program gives tools to improve children's fitness. A famous example is the shuttle run. It might be thought that endurance training is not for young children, however, Sophie learnt through the program that with an adapted program, endurance can be trained and improved already in young age. The shuttle run, a performance test, was made at the beginning and after some weeks of specific and children-adapted endurance training during the sport lessons. The teacher was surprised by how much the children had improved their endurance.

Conclusion

Sophie knows that the program itself will not be the miracle solution to reduce obesity. However, it is a small and easy step that can be integrated in daily life and can improve children's health by making them move more and be aware of the benefits of moving. And you, would you be interested in implementing such a program in your own country in order to help children to move more?

References

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