

Let's help our children as parents and as doctors

As fall rolls around and a new school year begins, those of you with school-age children or grandchildren will be anxious as they start a new year. It's a time for new classmates, new teachers, and new challenges. As parents, we focus on academics and ensuring our children get the best education that will give them a good start to their lives. However, do we also consider the importance for our children to be physically active? A lot of our children will be involved in sports and this will help them reach the goal of being active for 60 minutes per day, the recommended amount of physical activity for children aged 5 to 17. But what if our children are not involved in sports? How can we ensure they also get the recommended amount of activity?

In addition to being physically active, the amount of sleep children get is increasingly being recognized as important. The 2016 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth¹ emphasized the importance of sleep. As a result, 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth² have been released, which emphasize the importance of an appropriate amount of sleep for children. For children age 5 to 13 years, 9 to 11 hours of sleep is recommended, and 8 to 10 hours per night is recommended for those age 14 to 17. Without adequate sleep children are too tired to be active, and when they are not being active it makes it more difficult for them to sleep. These guidelines also emphasize the importance of limiting recreational screen time to minimize sed-

entary time. These are all factors that we as parents need to be aware of.

Do we as health professionals also have a responsibility to educate school-age children in these important areas? This begs the question of what our role is in health promotion

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for children. How can we play a role in promoting the importance of being physically active to children when we typically see children in the office only when they present with an illness? The ParticipACTION Report Card continues to rank our kids' activity level at a D-, which means less than 20% reach the guidelines of 60 minute per day. There is no silver bullet that will magically make children suddenly become more active. Everyone needs to do their part to help increase activity levels, reduce screen time, and help kids get the sleep they need and eat and drink healthy foods and beverages. This means parents, day-care operators, schools, parent advisory committees, community and recreation centres, sports teams, transportation systems, built environments, governments, and, yes, health care professionals and systems all play a role.

As we move into the fall we, as health care professionals, have opportunities to lead the way in promoting good health to our children. Schools will have a renewed focus on promoting physical activity to children, led by the Directorate of Agencies for School Health (DASH) BC and Action Schools BC, with new government funding.

During October the Doctors of BC Be Active Every Day initiative will be challenging school children to follow the Live 5-2-1-0 message: 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time per day, at least 1 hour of physical activity per day, and 0 sugar sweetened drinks per day. As well this year we will incorporate the importance of adequate sleep. We hope to work with schools to engage as many students as possible. That means we need doctors in every community to step up and help us lead the way in promoting these important health habits. October will also see an initiative for children to be active in Walk and Wheel to School Week (3 to 7 October). Let's make it happen! To learn more about Be Active Every Day, e-mail Patrick Higgins at phiggins@doctorsofbc.ca.

**—Ron Wilson, MD
Chair, Athletics and
Recreation Committee**

References

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2. Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology. 24-hour movement guidelines for children and youth, 2016. Accessed 3 August 2016. www.csep.ca/en/guidelines/get-the-guidelines.

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