

HeartMatters

Quarterly Bulletin of the European Heart Network



01



A healthy leap forward:

By: Leslie Busk

In 1998, the European Heart Network (EHN) launched a Europe-wide programme known as the European Heart Health Initiative (EHHI). The Initiative is supported by the European Commission and has two overall aims:

- to strengthen European cooperation in promoting effective action to reduce the incidence of cardiovascular disease (CVD) throughout Europe;
- to create awareness among policy makers, health professionals and thus also in the longer term the general public of the importance of fighting CVD through sharing ideas and experience on how this serious health scourge can be prevented.

At nation-state level, the Initiative's national coordinators (national heart foundations or other EHN member organisations pursuing activities to prevent CVD) started work to strengthen or create alliances with other organisations and entities. Together these organisations have sought to gain an overview of the current state of activities and projects in the area of CVD prevention. In some countries, such alliances were already either partly or fully developed,

whereas elsewhere formal alliances or partnerships had yet to be started. In both cases, the EHHI with its national focus on alliance building has made considerable progress during its first two years.

Synergies in the right place

Working together, the national alliances identified a pan-European theme, which became the focus for various activities across Europe under the banner of 'Children and young people' starting in 2000. In connection with a European 'Winning Hearts' conference, a declaration was adopted by the entire EHN membership, which includes 30 members from 26 countries in Europe, and by the European Society of Cardiology. This declaration states that 'Every child born in the new millennium has a right to live until the age of at least 65 without suffering from avoidable cardiovascular disease.' It underscores

the fact that CVD is largely avoidable if individuals choose healthy lifestyles and if politicians assist in making the healthy choice the easy choice by working to create a social environment conducive to healthy lifestyles. The declaration also makes it clear that a lifelong approach to the prevention of CVD (which remains the number one cause of death and a major cause of ill health and suffering) is preferable as it provides a solid foundation to build on for all individuals, regardless of origin and socio-economic conditions.

A little effort goes a long way

In 2000, the World Heart Federation launched the first World Heart Day ever. This event, which has the support of WHO and UNESCO, chose physical activity as its theme and was celebrated on 24 September in 77 countries around the world. In recent decades, physical activity has been



recognised as having an immensely beneficial effect on preventing CVD. It need not be a serious workout, but every adult should engage in at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most and preferably every day of the week. Such activities may include a brisk walk, swapping the lift for the stairs and similarly easy ways of embracing a more active life. Of course, the more the exercise the better – and this is true not least of all for children and young people.

Sadly, children have become less active over the years. The time children dedicate to physical activity is often limited to the hours that school curricula offer. The amount of time allotted by schools has in many cases been reduced, and if not the hours then often the quality of teaching in sports, gymnastics or swimming. Within the framework of the EHHI, national coordinators are working together to improve children's exercise levels at school and elsewhere.

Staying in the loop

This newsletter aims to keep you informed of the latest activities and developments, looking at the facts about children's lifestyles and, in particular, at their patterns of physical activity. It also provides a catalogue of projects, campaigns and actions that have been carried out at national level by heart foundations, other organisations working to prevent CVD and alliance partners. Policies to promote children's uptake of physical activity are also examined. This newsletter is the first in a series of publications focusing on children's and young people's lifestyles. Should you wish to know more about any of the issues raised here, EHN and its member organisations will be more than happy to engage in dialogue and to share our experiences, as we have done for many years in our own Network.

Leslie Busk

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Trends in physical activity – and inactivity – in early adolescence: experiences from Finland

By Matti Rimpelä, Stakes, Finland and Risto Telama, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

What comes around, goes around

Physical activity enhances physical, mental and social well being. It's as simple as that. What is more, physical activity and sport also serve as vectors for socialisation among young people. Recently, the discovery that fewer children and young people are engaging in physical activity has featured prominently in public debate. In scientific literature, physical activity and physical fitness assessments – together with the relevant recommendations – have emerged as topical subjects of research. The core questions are: What is considered sufficient physical activity

for a child? What kind of activity should this be? What kind of physical fitness are we aiming for? And finally, should physical fitness be monitored by assessments that are repeated at regular intervals?

In Finland, the physical activity of adolescents has been followed up since 1977 in a national survey (The Adolescent Health and Lifestyle Survey, Hämäläinen et al, 2000). Follow-up data has also been obtained from the study 'Cardiovascular Risk of Young Finns from 1980-89' (Telama et al, 1994).

A research programme, initiated in 1982 and co-ordinated by the WHO Regional Office for Europe Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC), has similarly yielded data on physical activity among adolescents in many European countries (Currie et al, 2000).

The purpose of this article is to present key research findings from different countries, share the results of the latest Finnish study and WHO-HBSC study and, finally, discuss the challenges highlighted by the follow-up study on adolescents' physical activity.

Are adolescents being physical enough?

Over the past few years, a variety of initiatives have sought to prepare consensus recommendations on the amount of physical activity adolescents should engage in. New recommendations consider it important that adolescents get some exercise on a daily basis, and that they take part in moderate to vigorous physical activity at least three times a week (Sallis & Patrick 1993; Corbin & Pangrazi 1998).

"Less than half of the surveyed adolescents had enough exercise when compared to the recommendations."

A study entitled 'Sportive Lifestyle, Motor Performance and Olympic Ideals of European Youth' surveyed the physical activity of 12 and 15-year-old adolescents

in six European countries (Telama & Yang 2000; Telama et al, unpublished manuscript). Physical activity was regarded as daily if it took place at least four times a week for at least twenty minutes each time. When physical education hours at school are taken into account, the result approximately corresponds to daily activity. According to this classification, less than half of the surveyed adolescents had enough exercise when compared to the recommendations. However, the survey did not include any physical activity other than specific leisure-time activities, so that the number of adolescents participating in some form of daily physical activity may be slightly higher.

The criterion for 'intensive activity' was that the activity had to take place at least twice a week for at least two hours per week; physical activity at school was also taken into account. About 50% of the

boys and 40% of the girls met this criterion (Telama & Young 2000; Telama et al, unpublished manuscript). The study revealed significant differences between countries with regard to both physical activity criteria. With age, the interest in physical activity tends to drop off, so that the proportion of inactive young people increases. In some countries, and especially with boys, polarisation of physical activity can be observed. While the overall number of inactive adolescents grows, some adolescents increase their intensive activity. In other words, as they grow older, boys and young men split up into two groups of increasingly active and inactive people.

Data on trends are hard to come by

Follow-up studies on leisure-time physical activity of youth are few and far between. An international consensus group (Biddle et al, 1998) has come to the conclusion that the scant research data available does not support the impression often presented in public that physical activity, as such, has decreased. Physical activity among young people has turned into more organised and adult-guided activities in many European countries (De Knop et al, 1996). In some countries like Sweden, the growth of organised activities in the 1980s led to a drop in independent individual physical activities to such an extent that total physical activity among young people also decreased. In the 1990s, independent activity and total activity

began to grow slightly again (Engström 1996). In England, a recent study based on pulse registration noted that physical activity among children has increased slightly over the past ten years (Welsman & Armstrong 2000).

Even less data is available on physical fitness among adolescents. The consensus group stated that the physical fitness of adolescents has not changed in the last forty years (Biddle, Sallis & Cavill 1998). In Finland, studies have shown that muscular strength and forward-bending suppleness stayed the same or even slightly improved during the 1985-95 period (Nupponen & Telama 1998). Muscular strength and endurance among Finnish conscripts also improved during the 1990s (Liesinen 2000).

"Being overweight during adolescence appears to be a more significant predictor of a range of future diseases than being overweight as an adult."

Being active versus being overweight

Although the most recent evidence is insubstantial and methodologically diverse, it does add some strength to the conclusions of previous reviewers that increased physical activity may lead to small but significant beneficial effects, in terms of reduced fat (Riddoch 1998). In studies of physical activity among young people, hardly any connection was found between physical activity and Body Mass Index (BMI). The relation to physical fitness was also nearly non-existent. In a study with a large Finnish cohort, a slightly significant negative correlation was found between BMI and physical activity among girls and boys aged 12, but not among girls and boys aged 15 (Yang, Telama & Leskinen 2000). Even a minor link between physical activity and excess weight is important, because there is good tracking of obesity from youth to adulthood and because being overweight during adolescence appears to be a more significant

predictor of a range of future diseases than being overweight as an adult (Riddoch 1998).

"The more physical education lessons the students had, the more actively they participated in physical activities during their leisure time."

Physical education at school

A worldwide Unesco survey showed that school-based physical education faces many problems the world over. The lessons included in the teaching programme do not always take place. Some schools have sought to reduce the number of lessons or eliminate them from the curriculum altogether. Shortcomings have been observed in teacher training, and appreciation of physical education as a subject is low (Hardman & Marshall 2000). This comes despite the findings of a recent large-scale American study showing that the more physical education lessons the students had, the more actively they participated in physical activities during their leisure time (Gordon-Larsen, McMurray & Popkin 2000).



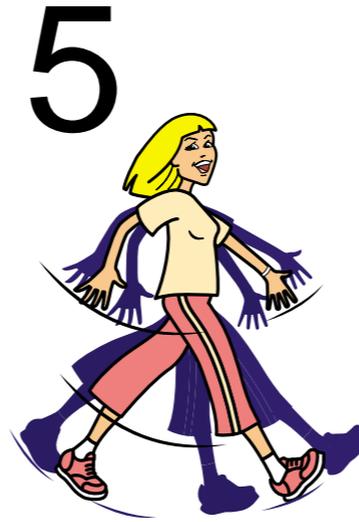
The physical activity landscape in Finland

Trends in physical activity among 12, 14, 16 and 18-year-olds were studied in the nationally representative biannual postal survey 'Adolescent Health and Lifestyle Survey, 1977-1999'. The number of respondents varied from 2,892 to 8,390 and the response rates from 76 to 88% in different years. The purpose of the most recent report was to find out how physical activity trends in adolescents have changed in 22 years and how Finnish adolescents meet the physical activity recommendations issued by American and British experts (Hämäläinen et al, 2000).

The findings showed that boys were physically more active than girls. Moreover, while activity rates (especially sports club activities) decreased with age, the perceived intensity of activities increased.

Participation in sports club activities, perceived intensity of activity and the proportion of those who reported very frequent physical activity increased during the study period. Activity outside sports clubs remained more common than participation in sports club activities during the whole study period. There was no indication of any polarisation in physical activity trends during the study period.

Frequency and perceived intensity were combined into 'effectiveness of physical activity' in order to assess how the recommendations were being met. According to the information collected in the AHLS Study, 40% of Finnish boys and 27% of girls were active enough to meet the recommendations in 1999.



HSBC Study — taking comparisons across borders

The Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) Study is a unique cross-national research effort (<http://www.ruhbc.ed.ac.uk/hbsc>). The first survey was carried out in Finland, Norway, England (United Kingdom) and Austria in 1983/84. Since then, the surveys have been conducted at four-year intervals in a growing number of countries, the latest in 1997/98 collecting data from 26 European countries or regions, Canada and the United States. Together with data on a wide range of health behaviour, the surveys asked

questions on exercise patterns. Unfortunately, the questionnaires were not administered in every country at the same time of year, and seasonal differences in opportunities for outdoor activities vary greatly from one country to another (Currie et al, 2000).

"Regular exercise...declined with age."

Some research findings were similar across most countries. Regular exercise was more common among boys than among girls and declined with age, especially for

girls. In all three age groups (11, 13 and 15-year-olds), students in Germany and Austria were most likely to report exercising for two or more hours a week, while those in countries such as Latvia, Portugal and the Russian Federation were least likely to do so (Hickman et al, 2000).

What does it all add up to?

Measuring physical activity among children and adolescents is a demanding task. Collecting data for cross-national comparisons is even more difficult. Unfortunately, there has not been too much interest in methodological studies to develop model instruments and study techniques for measuring trends over time both within and between countries.

Another methodological question concerns what the main focus of study should be. From the point of view of positive health and health promotion, emphasis on physical activity is well argued. Most studies concentrate on organised physical activity. It is difficult to determine how to measure unorganised exercise, which respondents may not regard as "physical activity" at all but which, in practice, promotes health.

Only a few studies have attempted to measure lack of exercise, and no follow-up data on trends of physical inactivity has been published so far. Health promotion studies have often been criticised for focusing too much on risk factors. Nonetheless, in the field of physical activity there is an urgent need to develop tools and methods for measuring physical inactivity.

Moving ahead — one step at a time

The main health arguments in promoting physical activity are related to cardiovascular health. Lack of exercise in childhood seems to be a major factor in the aetiology of many other diseases. Neck and shoulder pains among adolescents are increasing (Vikat et al, 2000). Many studies refer to the importance of physical activity in mental health promotion. In childhood and adolescence, there is a need for a well-balanced spectrum of interests as well as arguments to promote physical activity.

Published research findings do not support the popular hypothesis of diminishing physical activity in early adolescence, at least not in Finland. In many countries, participation in sports club activities has increased, but remains still less frequent than unorganised physical activity.

Fewer lessons are now being devoted to physical education at schools in many countries. Simultaneously, the content of physical education at school has led to increased criticism. The traditional orientation towards sport activities would not, however, appear to face any future challenges. Nonetheless, more collaboration between physical education teachers and physiotherapists is clearly necessary.

Even a quick look at research on time trends in physical activity among children and adolescents shows a remarkable discrepancy between the position of this issue on the public agenda and the volume of studies published. There is an urgent need for methodological studies that can help to develop more specific and sensitive survey tools covering the whole spectrum of physical activity, from lack of exercise to daily participation in sports training. The other topical challenge is to create nation-wide data collection systems that can take into account problems caused by seasonal variation and the requirements for cross-national comparisons.

"Participation in sports club activities has increased, but remains still less frequent than unorganised physical activity."

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EU policy developments

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Giving physical activity a boost

The majority of EU member states recognise the key role that physical activity plays in health. And yet, despite a heightened awareness of these health benefits, national governments have been slow to increase their focus on physical activity. Fortunately, many European countries are now taking bolder steps towards developing new and more relevant policies.

The European Network for the Promotion of Health-Enhancing Physical Activity (The HEPA Network) has been promoting the development of national physical activity policies, strategies and programmes in Europe since 1996. Initially, the Network's efforts resulted mainly in an increased awareness among decision-makers of the potential of physical activity for promoting health. Slowly but steadily, concrete measures to initiate strategies and develop new programmes started to emerge. Countries all over Europe began to set up expert groups and task forces, launch surveys of population activity levels and establish health councils where physical activity features as an important element.

Getting programmes up and running

Gradually, national programmes and strategies began to take shape. In 1996, national physical activity programmes appeared in England, Finland and The Netherlands. Now, four years later, Luxembourg, Sweden, and Switzerland have established national programmes, and Belgium is actively building up its own programme. Ireland and Spain are busy finalising the details of their national physical activity strategies, while Finland aims to complete its national strategy by the end of 2001. Denmark has launched a new health promotion action programme with goals, strategies, and initiatives regarding physical activity. Norway is finalising its strategic plan for physical activity. In Iceland, physical

activity is an integral part of both the new public health policy and the national health promotion council. In Italy, physical activity features in the National Health Plan, while positive developments are also taking place in France and Greece.

Passing the baton – sharing information and experience

National programmes and strategies are not the only efforts made. Co-funded by the European Commission, the HEPA Network has sought to support and encourage countries in their HEPA promotional work. Numerous people committed to advancing physical activity in the member countries are making the greatest efforts. The Network has facilitated this by offering consultation and information via electronic and printed media and by organising meetings and conferences that allow people to exchange ideas and experiences. Examples of the main publications produced by the Network include Guidelines for Health-Enhancing Physical Activity Promotion Programmes and Promotion of Transport Walking and Cycling in Europe: Strategy Directions, both of which are available as PDF documents on the Network's web site at: www.europe-on-the-move.nl. The www-guide "A Way of Healthy Walking. A Guidebook for Health Promotion Practice" is available at: www.reumaliitto.fi/walking-guide.

To give strong impetus to national HEPA policy development, the European HEPA Network is planning to hold the Third European Conference for the Promotion of Health-Enhancing Physical Activity in Denmark in autumn 2002. Before and after the conference, the Network will step up its efforts to facilitate and monitor the development of health-enhancing physical activity policies in Europe. For instance, the Network will organise expert meetings on HEPA strategy development and the promotion of transport walking

and cycling. The Network will also approach new quarters, such as governmental institutions and professional and civic organisations in the fields of medicine, public health, sport and leisure, education, environment and transport. The aim here is to create a strong network for promoting HEPA in Europe and, ultimately, to get HEPA policy development on the European agenda.

Building up a scientific basis for specific action

In December 1999, The European Heart Network (EHN) published a paper on Physical Activity and Cardiovascular Disease Prevention in the European Union, summarising the latest evidence relating a sedentary lifestyle to the risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD). The document aims to inform and update decision-makers and health professionals at European, national and local levels as to the implications of new research findings on physical activity. Since the 1950s it has been suspected that physical inactivity increases the risk of developing CVD, but it was not until the beginning of the 1990s that enough evidence was gathered to justify these suspicions. Today, the lack of physical activity is now also considered an established risk factor for diabetes II, obesity and hypertension, one of the main causes of cerebrovascular disease or stroke. For example, in 1999 the National Stroke Association of the United States began recommending physical activity as a measure for stroke prevention. Current research clearly shows the great value for cardiovascular and general health when even the modest levels of physical activity are promoted. The challenge now is for policy makers to work together to create living environments that favour a more physically active life, and for health professionals to put more emphasis on physical activity in CVD prevention programmes.

EHN recommends 30 minutes on most days

EHN recommends that every European adult should accumulate 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity most and preferably every day of the week. The activity should be of sufficient intensity to leave the participant slightly out of breath, but still able to talk. The actual intensity of the exercise will depend on the existing fitness level of the participant: a moderate-intensity brisk walk for a fit person will be much faster than for an unfit person. Physical activity needs to be habitual, current and lifelong. Young people (aged 5-18) should accumulate at least an hour a day of moderate-intensity activity to promote optimal growth and development and to help foster appropriate activity patterns into adulthood.

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Actions that European Heart Network recommends at national level

The EHN hopes that these recommendations will help to put physical activity higher up on the political agenda in the transport, planning, social and employment spheres as well as in public health.

Information: Raise awareness among key professionals of the importance of physical activity as a risk factor for CVD.

A new message: Raise public awareness of the modern health message that even low levels of physical activity are beneficial and that these can be achieved through the activities of daily life.

Environment and transport: Encourage changes in infrastructure and policy that increase the opportunities for physical activity as part of daily life.

Facilities: Increase opportunities and facilities for appropriate sport and active recreation for individuals and families.

Workplace: Promote physical activity through the workplace and encourage commuting on foot or by bicycle.

Education and physical activity skills: Develop school and teacher-training programmes that –emphasise enjoyable non-competitive physical activity and that foster the acquisition of essential sports and leisure skills and a lifelong physical activity habit.

Older people: promote physical activity appropriate for older people, which emphasises the development of social networks and enhances quality of life and independence.

Community involvement: Encourage whole-community approaches to the promotion of physical activity to all sectors of the population.

Access for the disabled: Develop clear well-structured physical-activity programmes for disabled people.

Equal access: Reduce the inequality in provision that affects black and minority ethnic groups, the long-term unemployed, and people from lower socio-economic groups.

Challenge or opportunity: Getting Europeans to be more physically active not only promises to produce health-enhancing effects for the individual and the community, it is also fully in line with parallel initiatives aimed at creating a greener and more ecologically-aware society. Raising physical activity levels needs to be seen not as a challenge, but as an opportunity waiting to be seized.

Actions that European Heart Network recommends for the European Union

Actions that EHN recommends for the European Union

Pan-European initiatives: Support pan-European initiatives designed to facilitate the uptake of and regular participation in physical activity and to raise awareness of the health benefits of physical activity.

EU policy: Develop an EU policy on health that enhances physical activity and develop a broad strategy for implementation in a range of sectors.

This should be linked to other policies that affect opportunities for physical activity, such as economy and finance, employment, transport, environment, regional policies, education and tourism.

EU surveys: Monitor EU citizens' participation in physical activity through regular surveys.

Research into special groups: Conduct pan-European research on physical activity patterns and identification of

effective promotion among children, women, the elderly and lower socio-economic groups.

Information exchange: Encourage information exchange on the effectiveness of physical activity intervention programmes among relevant pan-European networks in such areas as health, education and training, environment and transport.

In parallel with the EHN agreeing on policies needed at both European and national levels to promote physical activity, some countries have created their own policy recommendations.

The following recommendations which are examples of such national initiatives, were developed in Sweden and Finland.

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Sweden

Policy recommendations for making 2001 a year for physical activity

Get Sweden Moving – 2001

In autumn 1999, the National Institute of Public Health (NIPH) issued a report that showed a clear correlation between the level of physical activity and the state of health. The research indicated that physical inactivity is as significant as other known risk factors with regard to heart and vascular disorders, e.g. high levels of blood lipids, smoking and elevated blood pressure.

On the basis of this report the government felt justified in organising national co-ordination to counter the increasing levels of inactivity within the population. The NIPH brought together over 50 leading organisations and established a steering group with the following objectives.

Objectives for the Get Sweden Moving campaign in 2001:

- To increase our citizens' knowledge of, and interest in, physical activity and exercise.
- To improve conditions and amenities so that physical activities are possible for all.

- To improve health, especially in the case of groups exposed to the greatest risks.
- To give all people, irrespective of social position, gender, age, ethnic background and disability, an equal opportunity to increase their level of physical exercise.

A key strategy will be to reach the most inactive groups of the population by strengthening the capacity for action in society, developing personal skills, reorienting health care, developing supportive environments for health and building a social policy in accordance with the Ottawa manifesto for health-promoting work.

Two parallel approaches will be undertaken:

- Strategic measures will be taken in four arenas: Pre-school/school, the workplace, health care and leisure.

Working groups exist in each area and proposals for approximately 50 activities have been made. Each area will be the focus for three months of the year.

- Local and regional initiatives will be encouraged and opportunities created.

There will be tight co-ordination between the area groups and the local and regional players. Each region or county will recruit a 'messenger' to be responsible during the year for regional communication and the creation of regional networks.

The target groups are the professionals who can help to create a supportive environment for health-promoting physical activity.

The main message will be that daily exercise is important. The principle being that 30 minutes of physical activity can prevent a wide range of illnesses and that inactivity in Sweden is one of the major factors behind premature death and preventable illness.

Finland

Policy recommendations promoting physical activity among children and young people

Putting our best foot forward

The goal of Finnish heart health promotion is to ensure that exercise, or other sufficient and regular physical activity, becomes a stable lifestyle component among as many Finns as possible. This goal is in tune with national exercise policy objectives. It is best for the community and for individuals, if an active lifestyle is already adopted as a child. Everybody must be given the opportunity to engage in physical activity in their home community, the structure of which must encourage the development and maintenance of such a lifestyle. Persistence and cooperation

between different bodies is required to assure that suitable environments are provided.

The Action Plan for Promoting Finnish Heart Health (1998) made the following recommendations for the enhancement of physical activity among children and young people:

- Day-care centres should develop, for their own activities, ways to playfully enhance children's enthusiasm towards physical activity and physical skills.

- Primary schools, secondary schools as well as trade schools should include good health and mobility as educational goals.
- Sports and exercise organisations should systematically develop the quality of their youth activities and offer sports possibilities to young people who remain outside the traditional competitive sports.

Special attention should be drawn to the development of fitness and health monitoring systems for pupils.



Belgium mobilises its health forces

Policy-makers and health professionals come together

On 14 November 2000, over 160 policy-makers and health professionals met at the national symposium 'Belgium on the move'. The objective of the day was to emphasise the importance of physical exercise and the benefits that this could have on health in the long term.

Together with the fight against tobacco (both the active and the passive intake) and the promotion of healthy eating, it is generally recognised that, physical exercise is one of the main ways of defeating heart disease and cancer.

For this reason, the symposium 'Belgium on the move', was organised jointly between the Belgian Heart League and the Belgian Federation against Cancer. As lack of physical exercise can also contribute towards other health problems, such as lung disorders, rheumatic pains and obesity, the Belgian Association against Diabetes, the Institute for Health promotion and the Federation of Sportsclubs for Heart Patients, among others, also participated.

A practical approach

The objective of the symposium was to determine how young people, adults and senior citizens could be encouraged to take more exercise. The meeting targeted not only specialists but also members of the general public.

The subjects examined in the symposium included:

- How the health of the Belgian population compares internationally
- The role of physical exercise in the prevention of heart disease and cancer
- Physical exercise and well-being
- Genetic, social and environmental effects
- The roles various authorities play.

The symposium also included workshops that presented ideas for physical exercise for all age groups in the community.

You are what you eat – so eat and be healthy!

Belgian health officials have recently conducted studies that show that 18% of the population could be said to be obese, while 11% of children are overweight. The relevant authorities have also produced a pocket guidebook, 'A healthy diet, a practical guide for the prevention of disease'.



Schools Fitness Day – One day in the life of every child

Schools Fitness Day (skolernes motionsdag) is hosted in most Danish primary schools and takes place one day each year in October. The event aims to encompass all primary schools and all grades, with its target group of kids aged 6 to 16. Some 85 per cent of all primary schools take part in Schools Fitness Day. The total number of participants comes to around 600,000 pupils each year. In 2000, there were as many as 622,000. The event is sponsored by the Danish Heart Foundation (Hjerteforeningen), the Danish School Sports association (Dansk Skoleidræt), and Kellogg's. Schools Fitness Day was held the first time in 1983 and has been an annual event ever since.

The main purpose of the Day is to teach children about the positive impact of exercise on personal well-being in general and on heart disorders in specific. Furthermore, it gives all pupils the possibility to experience the fun of doing sports and other physical activities and basic knowledge of the link between health and a better way of life. 'Schools Fitness Day' features very highly in the Danish Heart Foundation's calendar of events and is sponsored with Dkr 250,000 each year.

Each year, the Danish Heart Foundation and the Danish School Sports association publish a catalogue of proposed activities ideas for dissemination to all Danish primary schools. This catalogue contains a wide range of possible actions regarding 'Schools Fitness Day', which aims to inspire and guide teachers and young people as to which kinds of exercise might prove most beneficial to them.

Getting the message across

Together with the Danish Ministry of Health, the Danish Heart Foundation has also made an interactive exhibition about sport, physical activities and health, which is now available in fifteen provinces. Each school can host the exhibition for two weeks.

To promote the exchange of information, the Danish Heart Foundation has published several pamphlets intended to inform and advise teachers and pupils in the middle school grades. Each of these publications – 'Body and Exercise' (Krop og Motion), 'Body and Food' (Krop og kost) and 'Body and Tobacco' (Krop og Tobak) – has met with great success.



Finnish Heart Association (FHA) programmes – Starting out where it matters most

Children's Health Forum

In 1999, the FHA invited partners who are active in the field of welfare among children and young people to discuss how best their collaboration might develop further. As a result, the participants formed the Children's Health Forum with the goal of improving the overall well-being of children and young people. Taken as starting points are the basic factors of daily life in families with children: nutrition, physical activity, rest and recreation. The primary objective is to support parents, professional educators, those involved in health work and others who are in contact with children, not forgetting the main target group: children and young people themselves. The Forum also targets decision-makers and other authorities to ensure that they are well informed about key actors and activities. The most valuable outcome of the Forum so far has been the creation of a platform for open debates and for developing cooperation.

Organisations taking part in this Children's Health Forum from the very beginning are the Finnish Heart Association, the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, the Association of Pulmonary Disabled, the Finnish Rheumatism Association, the Finnish Cancer Association, Young Finland, the Finnish Centre for Health Promotion and Bianca Morales Productions. As of the beginning of 2001, the Finnish Asthma and Allergy Association and Health Association joined the Forum. The National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES), the Education Council and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health have all contributed their support and expertise to the Children's Forum.

Activities focus on basic health matters such as diet, physical activity and healthy everyday living. The Forum publishes a monthly press release, which deals with the issues of the day. It has also produced an information pack on alliance members (activities, materials and a calendar of events).

The FHA's Workshop on Children's Welfare is scheduled to take place in March 2001. Topics will include child's development and physical activity. The aims of the Workshop are to evaluate the FHA's role in the promotion of children's and young people's health and to help develop realistic guidelines for the different actions.

Keeping kids up to speed

The activity peaks of the FHA are scheduled to occur in connection with the Heart Trip and the Heart Week. The Kids Project will be launched during Heart Week 2001 and the targets are day care centres and pre-schools. The materials to be produced include a leaflet on heart-friendly ideas for eating and moving, designed to be taken home by children and distributed at parents' evenings. They include recipes for between-meal snacks and ideas for health-enhancing physical activities. The teachers also have their own material with which they can bring the heart health promotion ideas into their daily activities during the Heart Week and afterwards. Partners in this project are the Young Finland Association and the Federation of Nursery School Teachers. Van den Bergh Foods sponsors the overall project.

Young Finland – Standing up for mobility rights

The Young Finland Association has been operating since 1987, encouraging children and young people to participate in physical activities. This mission is accomplished together with a variety of partners interested in physical activity among children and young people. The purpose is to ensure that every child has the right to practice some sort of physical exercise.

Both children and adults are encouraged to engage in discussions and to listen to each other's opinions. They are taught to work together in an agreed direction, so that young and old alike can respect and appreciate children's hobbies.

The target group consists of kindergarten, primary and secondary school children. The activities are mainly carried out at kindergartens, primary schools and sports clubs.

Young Finland's activities – a few examples

Active afternoon. The target group is 380,000 primary school children. Lazy and lonely afternoons are turned into a time for dynamic social activities with other young people.

Operation play rules. The target group consists of about 350,000 children and youngsters who attend sports clubs. Sports clubs have common rules of play, according to which every child must have the chance to participate in activities. Each child must be considered as important as the others, activities must be playful and pleasurable, competition is not as important as participation. The rules have been agreed upon with parents and children.

Settings for sports. Basic knowledge, instructions and models are produced to develop settings for physical activities. At present there are nine experimental plans, seven of which are state-subsidised.

Play kindergarten. At present, 'play kindergartens' are active in about 100 localities in different sports clubs and associations. The groups include some 7,000 children with their families.

New!

Around the world in an activity adventure

Preparation for this activity adventure is underway. More than 1,300 classes have enrolled and the adventure starts on 12 March. The goal is to 'move' as much as possible. The programme includes web sites for teachers, pupils and parents www.nuorisuomi.fi/liikuntaseikkailu. The web site also hosts a data bank, which gives tips for physical activities. Each class sets its own target to be reached, for instance generating as much movement as would be needed to cover the distance from Helsinki to Paris. When the class reaches its target city, the web site of the target opens. In addition, the class gets city and country information and local physical activity hints. Pupils cannot make real progress in this adventure unless everyone in the class participates.



Overview of recent projects supported by the German Heart Foundation:

Get your skates on! – A race for health

The German Heart Foundation is particularly proud of its project for up to 12 children and young people with congenital heart disease, who are invited to race on inline skates for two hours every second week. The project was designed for participants aged eight and older. Children and young people with congenital heart disease are joined by family members and friends. The Foundation has offered this sports event since July 2000, with the support of Prof. Hofstetter, paediatric cardiologist, and assistants from the University of Frankfurt/Main. K2, one of the biggest inline skating companies, provides the group with all necessary equipment, eliminating all financial obstacles for the young people and their families. The project aims to help young people discover their physical limits. During the project they gain self confidence. The University of Frankfurt/Main is carrying out research on physical exercise among young people in conjunction with this project.

Hit the slopes! – Kids enjoy fun in the snow

For the third time now, 22 young people with congenital heart disease will be buckling up for a skiing holiday in the town of Riezlern in Kleinwalsertal, Austria. From 11 to 18 March 2001, young skiers aged 9 to 23 will learn the technique of carving, a new and less exhausting way of skiing. Prof. Hofstetter from the University of Frankfurt/Main and his team, five cardiologists, four ski instructors, one student and a teacher, will help them to learn the sport and enjoy life in the winter paradise. During this project, studies will examine the sporting limits beyond which these young people can hope to push themselves. Ski equipment companies of international renown are providing participants with the necessary gear, but the young skiers will still have to pay part of their costs.

All hands on deck! – A sea change for young people

For the first time, the German Heart Foundation is setting sail on a traditional ship with 15 children and young people with congenital heart disease for an excursion on the Baltic Sea and the Danish south sea. From 14 to 21 July 2001, the children aged 12 and older, together with Prof. Kallfelz from Hanover, a second paediatric cardiologist and a group leader, will head out to sea to enjoy the wind and the sun. The "Sigandor" – a 35.5 m long, twin-masted sailing ship – and its crew, the skipper and two boatswains, are looking forward to this very special sporting event. Each of the young sailors will learn how to steer the ship, how to live and get along with the others on board, and they will discover their individual limits. Most importantly, they will be able to test their social communication skills, which can be quite challenging when confined to the ship's deck and cabins. On Saturday, 22 July, the young people's parents will also climb aboard and set sail for a day trip, during which their children will show them the ropes and demonstrate what they have learned about handling a traditional sailing vessel. Although several companies are generously sponsoring this project, the young participants and their families will be contributing to the overall costs.

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Irish are on the path to good health

Aiming to change young people's laid back lifestyles

In common with other European countries, children and young people in Ireland are leading more sedentary lifestyles. A survey of health and lifestyles, carried out in 1999, revealed that only 40% of 15-17 year olds in Ireland are taking part in regular physical activity. The decrease in activity levels is particularly noticeable among girls, dropping from almost 60% in 9-11 year olds, to just 26% in 15-17 year olds.

Because of these findings, the National Heart Alliance (NHA) wants to improve the country's infrastructure so that physical exercise is a practical possibility, especially for young people. At both national and local government level, the NHA has highlighted the need for safe play areas and safe walking and cycling routes, throughout the country. The Alliance has also opened a debate on the development of partnerships so that school facilities belong to the community as a whole.

Signposting the way

An NHA position paper on physical activity for children and young people will recommend that all young people (5-18 yrs) should participate in physical activity of moderate intensity for at least one hour each day. This position paper will be widely disseminated and publicised.

The publication of the paper will stimulate discussion and debate while at the same time offering practical strategies for change. In addition to recommendations regarding participation in physical activity, the paper will also incorporate specific policy recommendations to the many different agencies who play a part in promoting health-enhancing physical activity, including education, health, sports sectors and local government. These recommendations will include:

- The Department of Education and Science will be asked to expedite the delivery of the new Primary and Secondary Physical Education Curricula and provide the support necessary (training, equipment, etc.) to ensure that a high-quality physical education programme is an integral element of the programme of every school.
- Schools will be requested to provide Physical Education as a core element of the school syllabus for each pupil.
- Health Boards will be encouraged to provide support for well-planned, sustainable local initiatives and interventions relating to young people and to educate and train parents on the benefits of physical activity for their children.
- Local Authorities will be encouraged to provide a range of safe, accessible and attractive environments appropriate to the playing needs of children and young people. This might include parks, playgrounds and open spaces.
- Local authorities will also be encouraged to promote the concept of active transportation by incorporating safe walking and cycling routes into local development plans.

Action for Life takes activity to heart

Action for Life is an Irish Heart Foundation education resource for primary schools, which assists in the planning and teaching of physical education. Action for Life is a valuable and practical resource pack which includes easy to use lesson plans for four different age groups.

The programme provides children with opportunities to enjoy movement education, active play, dance and sports. The goals of the programme are to promote physical activity which is enjoyable, to enhance self-esteem by positive experiences and to provide learning opportunities for motor development and appreciation of the value of exercise for health.

Action for Life was distributed to all primary schools in Ireland the academic year 1996-97 and training for teachers in the use of the pack has been on-going in most health boards. To date nearly 2,000 teachers throughout the country have been trained.

A qualitative evaluation of Action for Life is currently being undertaken in the North Eastern Health Board region. Preliminary results show that teachers would like additional training, reflecting the lack of training in physical activity in primary teacher training, and that the activities of the Action for Life programme should include more activities that incorporate 'dance'.

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Dutch target healthy hearts

Campaign aimed at young for optimum benefits

In 2000, the Netherlands Heart Foundation mounted two campaigns that specifically targeted primary school children aged 11 to 12. The reasoning was clear as the atherosclerosis process – progressive narrowing of the arteries – starts at an early age.

The message of these programmes, Junior Heart Day and the Heart Dance Award, was one and the same: for a healthy heart, get your lifestyle right from the start.

The detailed objectives of these programmes were for primary school children:

- to be aware of the relationship between lifestyle and a healthy heart
- to understand the working of the circulatory system
- to appreciate the benefits of physical activity
- to develop a positive attitude towards physical activity.

Junior Heart Day just grows and grows

Junior Heart Day first took place in 1996 after a survey 12 months earlier on the lifestyle of young people in the Netherlands. It is now held bi-annually and the results evaluated on an on-going basis. In 2000, the Junior Heart Day was preceded by an additional competition, the 'Heart Dance Award'.

Junior Heart Day takes the form of a half-day lesson with instructive games and is organised in conjunction with Netherlands School Television. Before the actual day, teachers prepare themselves with the help of a handbook, and a preparatory lesson is dedicated to the heart. An instructional videotape and copies of 'A little book on a big muscle' are available to support this lesson.

The Day itself opens with a 20-minute TV programme, broadcast on national educational television, that stresses the importance of physical activity. This is followed by a Frisbee contest, which tests the skill and dexterity of the participants.

Finally, to cool down, pupils receive a copy of the magazine Get a kick with Rik & Tik. They can also play the computer game Ruben the red blood cell, part of a CD-ROM that is included in the Junior Heart Day kit. Puzzles and a certificate of participation are also provided.

Heart Dance Award keeps feet tapping

The Heart Dance Award, first held in 2000, is a dance contest between participating schools. Pupils – in groups of seven or eight – create their own dance routines and the winners of regional contests participate in the finals.

It has been such a big success that it will henceforth be an annual event. The final of the 2001 event will be held in Utrecht on 9 May. This will follow 12 regional competitions held across the Netherlands in April.

Pop-groups popular with Dutch school children take part in the competition together with well-known DJs and VJs. In order to be fully involved in this contest, children need to practice for many hours over a considerable length of time. Schools must register to be contestants in the Heart Dance competition. A 'Dance Award Kit', including a CD and information about the contest and its objectives, are provided free of charge.

Lessons learnt and a brighter future for all

Participation of pupils in the **Junior Heart Day** has increased from 66,000 in 1996 to some 83,000 in 2000. The latter figure represents 30% of the age group (10-and 11-year-olds) in Dutch schools.

Feedback has been positive, from both pupils and teachers. Students have gained an improved knowledge of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and a change in attitude has been reported for many children.

Teachers see the Junior Heart Day as a useful addition to the curriculum. 'It was innovative and fun to do', was a typical comment from one of the teachers. For the 2002 event, it is planned to involve more schools and children. The Dutch Heart Foundation is looking for partners and sponsors and is even considering putting on a musical.

The **Heart Dance** contest was a great success in the inaugural year 2000. Fifty-six schools participated and a post-contest evaluation showed that the underlying health message (the importance of physical exercise, the bad effects of smoking and the benefits gained from eating fruit and vegetables) was clearly understood.

Pupils and teachers enjoyed working together for a longer period on the dance routines. All concerned expect the contest to live long in the memory of the participants. More information is available on www.heartdanceaward.com (a Dutch-language site).

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Swedish campaign keeps kids moving

Pelle Pump 2001 promotes a healthy lifestyle

Pelle Pump is a character with a mission. He wants to convince kids that keeping fit is important and that means, among other things, having a healthy heart. 'Pelle Pump's adventure' is a school-campaign for fourth graders. The action aims to create a positive attitude towards physical activity, non-smoking and healthy eating and to encourage teachers (and parents) to be more proactive so that kids really do lead healthy lifestyles.

This is the second year that such a campaign has existed. This year, the programme started on 14 February and on the same day, Pelle Pump opened his website www.pellepump.nu to the world. This introduces the character and is packed with facts, advice, answers to questions and attractive animation. The activity will last until May and over 70,000 fourth graders will participate; that's approximately 50% of the children in this age group. Almost every other primary school in Sweden has enrolled at least one class in this campaign.

Plans for active playtimes

Last year, some 700 classes sent a description of their favourite outdoor games to the Swedish Heart Lung Foundation. We have selected fifty of those and published them in a booklet that will be distributed to all classes participating in the Pelle Pump campaign. The idea behind this action is to encourage teachers to go outdoors and introduce new games to the class during the break, thereby improving kids' concentration and increasing energy levels.

PLAY brings healthy competition

The PLAY (Promoting Lifetime Activity for Youth) programme aims to teach children the importance of being active for at least 30 minutes every day. The idea of the campaign originated in Arizona, and it encourages kids to get moving regardless of whether they are alone or with friends, indoors or out. The message is - *exercise does not have to be boring.*

The children will keep an activity journal during the seven weeks of the Pelle Pump campaign. One minute of activity is equal to one point in the journal. The teachers add the children's points together and calculate the classes' average score.

The class that has been the most active during the period wins the competition. This aspect of the campaign will be carried out in collaboration with the Swedish School Sports Council.

Keeping teachers in the loop

The campaign is backed by range of materials that will help teachers introduce Pelle Pump to the classroom as well as the playground. Every child will receive a free copy of a workbook that explains how the circulatory system functions. This book also includes several useful experiments and information about why healthy eating is important and the dangers connected with smoking.

The teachers get a handbook explaining how classes can get the most benefit from the Pelle Pump campaign while there is also a giant poster (almost as big as a 10-year-old child) that shows the circulatory system. The key message here is that regular exercise makes your heart grow stronger.

The website will also serve as a useful complementary teaching aid as it is packed with ideas, tips and advice.

Teachers are not left alone though. Sixteen conferences are being organised all over Sweden. The objective here will be to give class teachers inspiration and more information about the importance of physical activity and healthy eating.

The conferences will be hosted by local representatives for the Swedish Heart Lung Foundation and will serve as a kick-off for the start of the Pelle Pump campaign.

On the road again

During three weeks in April, the Swedish Heart Lung Foundation will visit 100 schools throughout Sweden with an activity team. The team will target the schools who have participated in the Pelle Pump campaign and there will be a host of competitions and games. Healthy food will be available and there'll be music to accompany any impromptu dancing.

Not forgetting last year's campaign

Last year, the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm carried out an extensive evaluation of Pelle Pump. This evaluation showed that 99% of the teachers interviewed believed that it should be possible for schools to have some influence on student lifestyles.

88% of the teachers thought that the concept of promoting healthier lifestyles should be given a higher priority in schools. The total amount of time spent on a campaign such as Pelle Pump can vary between three and 32 hours. Some 64% of interviewed teachers used more than eight hours.

The character Pelle Pump together with the students' handbook and the poster are based on the British Heart Foundations Artie Beat-campaign and appears in Sweden with the kind permission of the British Heart Foundation.

Brit kids get out in force

In 2000, the British Heart Foundation (BHF) managed a range of activities all with the main objective of encouraging children and young people to increase their levels of physical activity. The Heart Week 2000 campaign promoted the concept of *Get kids on the go*, Active School Resource Packs were made available and a number of sponsored fund-raising activities were organised. But with all this activity, no-one could overlook Artie Beat.

The Artie Beat phenomenon

Artie Beat is a popular character with pre-teen kids in the United Kingdom. He's got his own club and even his own web page, which expounds the benefits of regular exercise and a balanced diet. Artie also makes an impassioned plea for kids not to start smoking. 'It's simple', says Artie, 'be smart, don't start.'

Artie 'bounces with health' and his club is aimed at the 7-11 age group. Members receive a club badge, an Artie Beat badge and four editions of Artie's news each year. The BHF has also issued Artie Beat's healthy cookbook containing 45 recipes sent in by children as a result of a competition in the Artie newsletter. The cookbook aims to get children to enjoy cooking and understanding how diet can affect health. Recipes include spicy carrot & lentil soup and crunchy fish.

You can find out more about Artie Beat at www.bhf.org.uk/kids/z_index.html

British Heart Week 2000

The theme of British Heart Week 2000 was *Get kids on the go*. An 18-page booklet was produced to support the campaign and over one million copies were distributed in the United Kingdom. The leaflet contained information on:

- Why children need to be active
- How much activity children need
- A questionnaire so that current activity levels could be checked
- Ideas to get children physically active
- How to choose the right activities.

The underlying theme of encouraging parents to help their children to be more active was developed in response to concerns that the current levels of inactivity are reaching a crisis point. The BHF fears that unless there is a change, there will be more premature deaths from coronary heart disease.

British Heart Week didn't stop with distributing booklets though, as there were a number of fund raising activities that took place in the week of 10-18 June. Organised activities included walking, golf, cycling, hiking and even a little light mountaineering. The latter incorporated Britain's Biggest Mountain Challenge - a weekend of scaling Ben Nevis, Scafell Pike and Snowden (respectively the biggest peaks in Scotland, England and Wales).

Encouraging kids of all ages to get up and go

The BHF also organised a range of activities that both encourage schools to promote physical activity and raise funds to help support the Foundation's work.

In co-operation with the BHF National Centre for Physical Activity & Health, the *Jump Rope For Heart* campaign was aimed at primary schools. It lasted throughout the year and encouraged children to skip regularly. Participating schools received free skipping equipment and materials to aid lesson planning.

Keep The Beat, also produced in co-operation with the BHF National Centre for Physical Activity & Health, aimed to get out of the habit of being 'couch potatoes' or 'computer gamers'. Pupils could choose any activity (volleyball, cycling, hockey, karate, yoga, aerobics, trampolining, roller-blading, etc.) and after a few weeks practice, they could hold a sponsored session (an 'activent') in the chosen activity. *Keep The Beat* T-shirts and manuals were available in support of the event.

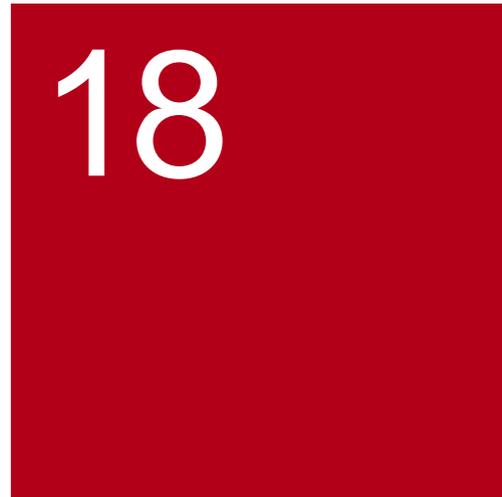
Teenagers had the opportunity to play in the *BHF Junior Golf Championship*. The competition was targeted at secondary schools and the final was held at the Belfry - the Ryder Cup venue for 2001.

Schools lead the way forward

The BHF Education Department produced a range of materials that address the levels of physical activity among young children. The Active Schools Resource Packs gave schools ideas and advice on how to encourage pupils to be more active.

The BHF also recognised that school Physical Education lessons are the only strenuous activities in which 30% of 11 to 16-year-olds participate. Furthermore a quarter of this age group spend over four hours per day watching TV.

To combat this situation, the BHF produced a report entitled 'Couch Kids - the growing epidemic'. Aimed at parents and schools, the report outlines how children could be encouraged to get fit and thereby lessen their chances of incurring heart diseases in later life.



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The mission of the European Heart Network is to play a leading role through networking, collaboration and advocacy in the prevention and reduction of cardiovascular disease so that it will no longer be a major cause of premature death and disability throughout Europe.

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