

Active kids are smarter

Analysis shows marks improve after playing sport

STUDENTS who play sports during the school day are more likely to achieve higher grades, new research has revealed.

University analysis of 115 studies involving more than a million children in Australia and overseas found a positive link between academic performance and participation in physical activity.

Marks were boosted if kids aged 9-18 played sports during school hours for an average of two hours a week.

Science and mathematics subjects showed the highest-grade improvements in physically active students.

University of Sydney biostatistician and the study's lead author Katherine Owen said skills young students learnt on the field were most easily transferred to those study areas. She said the biggest improvements were reported in school times because students resumed learning immediately after being active at lunchtime or in physical education class.

"Skills developed through sport, like problem solving, are quite useful in those subjects," Dr Owen said.

"We think it's because of the immediate effect of sport on concentration and attention. There's just an immediate effect on the performance for the kids who do sports in school."

Australian students are required to complete 2 1/2 hours of physical activity at school per week until they reach year 10.

Participation in sports for year 11 and 12 students is encouraged, but not compulsory.

Senior research fellow at Deakin University's Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition (IPAN) Natalie Lander said it was "integral" for students to do an hour of physical activity each day because exercise dropped dramatically when kids transitioned from primary school to high school, where they were often seated for longer periods of time.

"Sitting for a long period of time is actually restrictive to learning. Meaningful movement increases attention and focus, cognitive development and reduces stress and depression," she said.

Dr Owen said the preliminary findings would help research causes for performance improvements, but it was "very important" that schools helped students get enough exercise because it helped them develop physically and socially.

— Jenkins, O 2022, 'Active kids are smarter', *Courier Mail*, 22 April, p. 3.