

Perception and attitudes towards physical activity in healthy weight and obese adolescents

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Introduction: Physical activity plays a crucial role for both obesity prevention and treatment in adolescents. Despite numerous resources devoted to promoting physical activity in youth, the numbers of adolescents who actually participate in physical activity are low. Several factors, including the perception that exercise may be difficult or negative attitudes towards exercise, may contribute to this inactivity in adolescents. This study investigated these two potential barriers to participation in physical activity in both healthy weight and obese adolescents.

Methods: A cross-sectional analysis of 26 participants [18 healthy weight (25th - \leq 85th body mass index (BMI) percentile, 8 obese ($>$ 95th BMI percentile), 14 males, 12 females] between the ages of 13 and 18 years participated in a standardized, submaximal treadmill walking test. Prior to the test, participants were asked to rate how much discomfort (on a scale of 0-10) they expected to experience during the treadmill test. Participants were also administered questionnaires regarding their attitudes towards physical activity.

Results: Prior to performing the treadmill test, the obese adolescents anticipated that the exercise would be significantly more difficult compared to the healthy weight adolescents ($p < 0.05$). Obese adolescents also displayed greater negative attitudes towards physical activity, although not significantly so, than their healthy weight peers.

Discussion: This study identified the perception of exercise difficulty as a significant barrier to participation in physical activity for obese adolescents compared to their healthy weight peers. Furthermore, the obese adolescents expressed greater negative attitudes towards physical activity than the healthy weight adolescents. The identification of exercise difficulty and negative attitudes as barriers may help explain why adolescents are not participating in the recommended amounts of physical activity and may allow practitioners to target specific contributors to inactivity. Furthermore, targeting these specific barriers may assist in the development more effective methods for promoting physical activity in this population.