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Study links physical fitness levels of Spanish teenagers to cardiovascular health

30. Septiembre 2009 02:38

Experts of the Department of Medical Physiology of the University of Granada (EFFECTS-262 research group) are leading a national research to measure the level of physical fitness of Spanish teenagers and its connection with their future cardiovascular health. The study, called AVENA, reveals that the cardiorespiratory fitness level of one out of five teenagers indicates there is a risk of having cardiovascular diseases in the future. According to researchers, the level of physical fitness in adults, as well as the presence of other cardiovascular risk factors - such as hypercholesterolemia and [Hypertension](#).aspx">high blood pressure - are associated to the level of physical fitness during the childhood and adolescence. Hence, experts have examined in 2000-2002 the physical fitness of almost 3,000 teenagers aged between 13 and 18.5 from Granada, Madrid, Santander, Saragossa and Murcia.

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In order to carry out such project, the students performed some physical tests of strength, speed, agility, flexibility and aerobic capacity, expressed by the maximum oxygen consumption. After analysing and processing their details, scientists have come to the conclusion that a fifth part of Spanish teenagers show a future cardiovascular risk, according to their current aerobic capacity. Moreover, this group of students also have a lower performance in the other physical tests.

The research project titled 'Alimentación y Valoración del Estado Nutricional en Adolescentes (AVENA)' also compares the physical fitness of Spanish teenagers with other 16 similar research projects made in 11 countries. After the review, experts believe that Spanish teenagers as a whole have a lower fitness level than those from countries like Sweden, Belgium, Denmark, Saudi Arabia, Portugal, Japan, and China.

The novelty of this project is that reference values have been established in order to correctly evaluate and interpret the level of fitness of any teenager. The experience obtained with this study and others of similar characteristics has resulted in experts from Granada taking part in a European project called HELENA (Healthy Lifestyle in Europe by Nutrition in Adolescence) testing fitness levels. The HELENA data collection has taken place from 2005 to 2008 will provide interesting information about the health status of European teenagers. The preliminary data from more than 3,000 teenagers from nine European countries show that two out of five teenagers have a low cardiorespiratory fitness level associated with a higher risk of future cardiovascular disease. This percentage is higher than that observed in the AVENA study, probably because cardiorespiratory fitness is decreasing worldwide, so current data are expected to be more alarming than those from the past.

School-based intervention are highly needed in order to improve health in children and adolescents, through physical fitness enhancement. To increase the number and/or intensity of physical education at school seems to be a promising strategy to achieve this goal. In this context, our group has just implemented an intervention study based on increasing the volume and intensity of physical education and assessing its effects on physical fitness levels and other health parameters. The results from this study, called EDUFIT (EDUCation for FITness) study, are currently being analysed.




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