

CONTRIBUTION OF SPORTS AND EXERCISE TO PROMOTION OF HEALTHY LIFE AND WELLBEING

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Abstract

This review examined the role of sport and exercise in disease prevention and control by looking at the major ways by which regular exercise and fitness contributes to optimal health and wellness. The review highlighted the general and specific benefits of sports and exercise to the wellbeing of an individual. The role of physical activity in physical and mental health have been stated. In the same vein, the benefits of physical activity on ageing has been clearly described. Furthermore, the role of physical activity in the prevention and management of major chronic diseases has been addressed. These include cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, obesity and cancer. It is recommended that different policy options should be employed to reach the recommended levels of exercise, sports or physical activity globally, such as the development and implementation of national guidelines for health-enhancing physical activity as well as the integration of sports within other related policy sectors, in order to ensure that policies and action plans are coherent and complementary.

Key words: Exercise, Sports, Physical Activity, Healthy Life, Optimal Health.

Introduction

Exercise is one of the most important factors in a persons' life. Physical activity, or the lack of it, can result in a person having a healthy life or cause them to have diseases. The benefits of exercise are countless. The positive health results, the improvement in attitude, even better academic performance are all factors which makes not exercising inexcusable. Merely not using a person's body is harmful. Not being active results in a person's muscles becoming weak and out of healthy condition. The effectiveness of a person's heart and lungs will decrease. A person's joints will become stiff and can be injured easily. Inactivity can be as much of a health risk as smoking.

According to Musa, Tyoakaa and Ihuma (2016), during recent decades, there has been a progressive decline in the level of physical activity in people's daily lives in developed countries. This has been attributed to mordernisation where machines have replaced manual labour. For majority of people, little physical effort is in their work: domestic chores, transportation and leisure. Whilst health risks of sedentary life style

differ between countries and regions, the fact remains that physical inactivity is a major risk factor for most common non-communicable diseases and physical activity can counteract many of the ill effects of inactivity. The WHO estimates that, with the exception of sub-Saharan Africa, chronic diseases are now the leading causes of death in the world. WHO cites four non-communicable diseases that make the largest contribution to mortality in low- and middle-income countries, namely: cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic respiratory disease, and diabetes (Statistics Canada, 2012).

One of the most widely-used definitions of health is that of the World Health Organisation (WHO), which defines health as: "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity ". This definition goes well beyond a condition of physical health but includes mental health and general well-being.

Kumar (2017) stated that, sport and physical activity has long been used as tool to improve mental, physical and social well-being. Physical inactivity is a major risk factor associated with a large number of lifestyle disease such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and obesity. Sports projects that specifically focus on health outcomes generally emphasise the promotion of healthy lifestyle choices among children and young people as well as adults to combat inactivity; the use of sport as a tool to raise awareness on communicable diseases in developing countries for example, through district or national health campaigns supported by athletes and sports competitions; the use of sport as a didactical tool to communicate vital health-related information to 'at risk' groups; the use of sport to mobilise hard-to-reach groups as part of large-scale health campaigns including for example, communities with low population density, and sport is considered to contribute to achieving mental health objectives, including addressing depression and stress-related disorders.

There is no doubt that the public is becoming more aware of the importance of physical activity and fitness programmes. Mansfield and Piggin (2016), stated that there are many ways in which regular physical activity and good fitness contribute to optimal health and wellness. It can aid in disease/illness prevention. There is considerable evidence that the risk of hypokinetic conditions can be greatly reduced among people who do regular physical activity and achieve good physical fitness. Virtually all chronic diseases that plague the society are considered to be hypokinetic, though some are related more to inactivity than others. Nearly three-quarters of all deaths among those of 18 years and others are as a result of chronic diseases

Leading public health officials have suggested that physical activity is related to the health of people (Piggin & Bairner, 2014). It directly reduces the risk for several major chronic diseases; and also stimulates positive changes with respect to other risk factors for these diseases. Physical activity produces the shortcut for the control of chronic diseases, much like immunization controlled infectious diseases. Physical activity and fitness can be a significant contributor to disease/illness treatment. Even with the best disease-prevention practices, some people will become ill. Regular exercise has been shown to be effective in alleviating symptoms and aiding

rehabilitation after illness for such hypokinetic conditions as diabetes, heart attack, backpain and others (Piggin, & Bairner, 2014; Kumar, 2017).

Laskowski and Lexell (2012) further stressed the benefits of physical activity and fitness in health and wellness promotion. People who exercise regularly tend to do so because it gives them an enormous sense of wellbeing. They feel more energetic throughout the day, sleep better at night, have sharper memories, and feel more relaxed and positive about themselves and their lives. And it's also powerful medicine for many common mental health challenges.

Sports, Exercise and Good Health

Exercise can improve health and reduce the risk of developing several diseases like type 2 diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal conditions and others. Physical activity and exercise can have immediate and long-term health benefits. Most importantly, regular activity can improve quality of life. A minimum of 30 minutes a day can allow you to enjoy these benefits.

Researchers have documented the benefits of regular physical activity for a healthy life. For example, Durstine, Gordon, Wang and Luo (2013) reported that regular physical activity reduces the risk of hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers. Also, Skille and Solbakken (2011) submitted that engaging in regular physical activity improves psychosocial health and decreases stress. Regular physical activity is clearly effective in the secondary prevention of cardiovascular disease and effective in attenuating the risk of premature death among men and women (Downward & Rasciute, 2015).

Health Benefits of regular physical activity

A number of scholars such as Laskowski and Lexel, (2012), Piggin and Bainer (2014), Downward and Rasciute (2015) as well as Mansfield and Piggin (2016) have identified a number of health benefits of regular physical activity as:

- ✓ reduce your risk of a heart attack
- ✓ manage your weight better
- ✓ have a lower blood cholesterol level
- ✓ lower the risk of type 2 diabetes and some cancers
- ✓ have lower blood pressure
- ✓ have stronger bones, muscles and joints and lower risk of developing osteoporosis
- ✓ lower your risk of falls
- ✓ recover better from periods of hospitalization or bed rest
- ✓ Feel better — with more energy, a better mood, feel more relaxed and sleep better.

The Physical and Mental Health Benefits of Sport, Exercise and Physical Activity.

Although research interest on physical activity and health dates back to the 1950s, the breakthrough in the scientific evidence on health benefits of physical activity largely took place during the 1980s and 1990s. There is an overwhelming amount of scientific evidence on the positive effects of sport and physical activity as part of a healthy lifestyle. The positive, direct effects of engaging in regular physical activity are particularly apparent in the prevention of several chronic diseases, including: cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, hypertension, obesity depression and osteoporosis.

The Report from the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on sport for Development and Peace states that young people can benefit from physical activity as it contributes to developing healthy bones, efficient heart and lung functions as well as improved motor skills and cognitive function. Physical activity can help to prevent hip fractures among women and reduce the effects of osteoporosis. Remaining physically active can enhance functional capacity among older people, and can help to maintain quality of life and independence.

Furthermore, the WHO in McKinney, Lithwick, Morrison, Nazzari, Isserow, Heilbron, and Krahn, (2016) has estimated that one in four patients visiting a health service has least one mental, neurological or behavioral disorder, but most of these disorders are neither diagnosed nor treated. A number of studies have shown that exercise may play a therapeutic role in addressing a number of psychological disorders. Studies also show that exercise has positive influence on depression. Physical self-worth and physical self-perception, including body image, has been linked to improved self-esteem. The evidence relating to health benefits of physical activity predominantly focuses on intra-personal factors such a physiological, cognitive and affective benefits, however, that does not exclude the social an inter-personal benefit of sport and physical activity which can also produce positive health effects in individuals and communities.

There are a number of factors influencing the way in which sport and physical activity impacts on health in different populations. Sport and physical activity in itself may not directly lead to benefit but, in combination with other factors, can promote healthy lifestyles. There is evidence to suggest that changes in the environment can have a significant impact on opportunities for participation and in addition, the conditions under which the activity is taking place can heavily impact on health outcomes. Elements that may be determinants on health include: nutrition, intensity and type of physical activity, appropriate footwear and clothing, climate, injury, stress levels and sleep patterns.

Sport and physical activity can make a substantial contribution to the well-being of people in developing countries. Exercise, physical activity and sport have long been used in the treatment and rehabilitation of communicable and non-communicable diseases. Physical activity for individuals is a strong means for the prevention of diseases and for nations is cost-effective method to improve public health across populations.

Sport, Physical Activity and Risk Factors for Major Diseases

An understanding of the most prevalent diseases and associated risk factors is crucial to conceptualise the role of sport in disease prevention and health promotion. In developing countries sport is widely used as a tool to educate individuals and communities on the risk factor associated with chronic diseases. There is a significant increase in the global burden of non-communicable diseases related to lifestyle changes in physical inactivity, unhealthy diets and tobacco use (Agena, Musa & Tyoakaa, 2019). Some of the most prevalent non-communicable diseases include:

Cardiovascular diseases

Cardiovascular diseases include coronary heart disease and stroke and are the leading cause of death globally. Causes of cardiovascular disease are unhealthy diets, physical inactivity and tobacco use. Physical activity reduces the risk of cardiovascular diseases by improving glucose metabolism, reducing body fat and lowering blood pressure.

Diabetes

Diabetes is a disease which occurs when the body does not produce or properly use insulin and this may result in Type I or Type II diabetes. Diabetes may be prevented, or at least delayed, by weight loss, a healthy lifestyle, in particular, regular physical activity. Diet, drug therapy and physical activity are also major components of the treatment of diabetes.

Obesity

Obesity is an abnormal accumulation of fat that may impair health and unlike other diseases, social and environmental factors play a significant role in defining obesity. Lloyd-Jones, Adams, Brown, Carnethon, Dai and De Simone (2010) stated that, the incidence of obesity is a growing concern internationally with an estimated 400 million obese people. The global rise in the incidence of obesity is related to a shift in diet and decreased physical activity levels (Musa, Tyoakaa & Ihuma, 2016).

Cancer

Cancer is not a single disease with a single type of treatment and in fact, there are over 200 types of cancer involving abnormal growth of cells in different parts of the body. It has been estimated that 40% of all cancers may be prevented by a healthy diet, physical activity and no tobacco use.

Mental health

Lloyd-Jones, Adams, Brown, Carnethon, Dai and De Simone (2010) stated that one in four patients visiting a health service has at least one mental, neurological or behavioural disorder (such as depression, anxiety or mood disorders) that may not be diagnosed or

treated. There is evidence to suggest that physical activity can reduce the symptoms of depression and can also help to ameliorate mental well-being through improved mood and self-perception. Global trends in physical inactivity claim that more than 60% of adults do not participate in sufficient levels of physical activity and physical inactivity is more prevalent among women, older adults, people from low socio-economic groups and people with disabilities.

It was estimated that 80% of cardiovascular disease deaths occurred in low- and middle-income countries (Cekin, 2015). The prevalence of those suffering from overweight and obesity is increasing in developing countries and even -in low-income groups in richer countries. The rise of chronic disease, coupled with the existing burden of communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, produces a 'double burden of disease' on low- and middle-income countries.

There are a range of methodologies utilised around the world to deliver health promotion and prevention strategies and an interesting example is the emergence of internet-based health information for developing countries. Sport and physical activity, however, remains an attractive low-cost strategy to promote healthy behaviours and lifestyles throughout the lifespan and reduce the burden of chronic diseases on public health systems.

Physical Activity and Ageing

An abundance of epidemiological data reveal unequivocally that physical activity and (or) illness are associated with a decreased risk of morbidity (e.g., cardiovascular disease, diabetes, colon cancer) and all-cause mortality, and inactivity is a major risk factor. Given that a large proportion of the population is inactive or relatively sedentary (NACA, 2006), an increase in physical activity (or fitness) is the most important intervention that would enhance population health. However, there remains a need for critical analysis of the amounts and types of physical activity needed to prevent disease and promote health. In Africa, Asia, and South America, where older adults maintain an active lifestyle, individuals do not acquire many of the characteristics commonly associated with aging in North America (US, Department of Health and Human Services, 1996). This report indicates that, in general, older adults become much less active than younger adults. Losses in muscle fitness associated with loss of balance, greater risk of falling, and less ability to function independently. Though the amount of activity performed must be adapted as people grow older.

Conclusion

From the review, we can come to a conclusion that regular physical activity of moderate intensity — such as walking, cycling, or doing sports — has significant benefits for health. At all ages, the benefits of being physically active outweigh potential harm, for example through accidents. Some physical activity is better than doing none. By becoming more active throughout the day in relatively simple ways, people can quite easily achieve the recommended activity levels. It should be clear, that physical fitness is much more than being well or being sick, just as health is an essential quality of good life. In conclusion, the benefits of physical activity in late years are beginning to be understood. Along with appropriate diet, exercise appears to

be a key factor in controlling the effects of aging. Participating in physical activities has been linked with reduction in tension, reduced state of anxiety, depression thus enhancing sense of wellness and reduction rate in both developed and underdeveloped nations of the world. There is an overwhelming amount of scientific evidence on the positive effects of sports and physical activity as part a healthy lifestyle. The positive effects of engaging in regular physical activity are particularly apparent in the prevention of several chronic diseases as previously stated to include cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, hypertension, depression, obesity, stress and osteoporosis.

Recommendations

It is recommended that different policy options to reach the recommended levels of Exercise, sports or physical activity globally, such as:

- the development and implementation of national guidelines for health-enhancing physical activity;
- the integration of sports within other related policy sectors, in order to secure that policies and action plans are coherent and complementary;
- the use of mass media to raise awareness of the benefits of being physically active;
- the surveillance and monitoring of actions to promote sports and exercise.

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