

Exercising to Prevent Adolescent Obesity and Diabetes

By Susan McGinley

Physical inactivity is a risk factor for obesity and non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus in children and adults. Studies show that physical activity declines more dramatically in girls than in boys during and after puberty, and this decline is associated with greater adolescent obesity and an earlier onset of diabetes.

To fill a need for physical activity programs designed to suit the unique interests and needs of adolescent girls, researchers in the Department of Nutritional Sciences, together with colleagues in the UA Colleges of Medicine, Public Health and Education, are working together to develop and test a comprehensive physical activity program tailored specifically to the interests of adolescent girls. The scientists are collaborating with investigators at seven other universities: Johns Hopkins University, University of Maryland, University of Minnesota, University of South Carolina, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Tulane University, and San Diego State University.

In 2002 a comprehensive program was developed to engage adolescent girls in regular physical activity. Known as TAAG (Trial of Activity of Adolescent Girls), the project promotes a unique university-community-agency-school partnership to develop, deliver, and sustain the program. Girls have the opportunity to participate in diverse school-based community-based programs designed to appeal to many interests (e.g., P.E. and traditional sports teams, dance, kick-boxing, Jump Rope for Heart and others). The program is currently being tested for its appeal to adoles-



cent girls and its efficacy for increasing physical activity and improving heart and lung function.

More than 1,800 girls participated in Phase I, including 310 girls in Tucson, in studies designed to test intervention activities and develop measurement protocols. Girls took part in dance and drama, ethnic dance, Jazzercise, and other girl-friendly activities, and a new equation was developed for estimating body composition in Anglo, Hispanic and African-American girls.

Approximately 3,000 girls in six cities are currently participating in innovative activity programs during and after school. In Tucson, 450 seventh-grade girls in Amphitheater, Sunnyside and Catalina Foothills School Districts are participating. If successful, it is expected that schools and communities nationwide will adopt this one-of-a-kind program developed specifically for adolescent girls. ☒

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