



US Play Coalition is a partnership to promote the Value of Play throughout life.

The Play Pulse is a regular publication of the US Play Coalition that surveys the state of PLAY through trends in related indicators.

PLAY PULSE POINTS

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: THE WONDER DRUG

UPBEAT: The Center for Disease Control (CDC) states regular physical activity is one of the most important things you can do for your health.

DOWNSIDE: The World Health Organization (WHO) ranks physical inactivity as the 4th leading cause of death.

ACTION: Take a family walk. Try out the new areobics class you have been eyeing. Join "Recess Moms movement to insure our children have recess in schools. Just GET MOVING!

BOREDOM: GOOD OR NOT SO GOOD?

UPBEAT: There are positive outcomes associated with boredom such as increased creativity and time to discover new things.

DOWNSIDE: When we are bored we are more likely to eat poorly, abandon exercise, suppress anger, struggle with stress related problems, or embrace alcohol or drugs (including cigarettes).

ACTION: Welcome boredom as a mental 'time out' or choose to do something fun.

NATURE: IT'S A NATURAL

UPBEAT: Being in nature, or even viewing scenes of nature, reduces anger, fear, and stress and increases pleasant feelings.

DOWNSIDE: Research shows that the average American spends 87% of their time in enclosed buildings and 6% of their time in enclosed vehicles.

ACTION: Invite a friend to join you on a walk around your block, office building, or whatever green space is most convenient to you.

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Using data and science, Play Pulse depicts trends of the state of PLAY and examines each indicator by identifying BENEFITS and capturing related outcomes.

UPBEAT

and

DOWNSIDE

while encouraging

ACTION

We measure children on what they have learned and publish the results. We have devices to track vital signs and calories consumed. As Americans we track many aspects of how we live, work, learn, and play. But what about PLAY itself?

We all think about PLAY – those freely chosen options that we pursue during our leisure time. We recall the carefree days of childhood summers. We carefully choose after school programs or summer camps for our children. We even have special places and trips for older adults.

As a nation, we seem to give lip service to the variety of reasons why play is an important aspect of life for our children: an antidote to the pace of society and a guaranteed cure for healthy aging.

We may talk a good game about work-life balance and the desire for more down time, but how well are we actually doing?

That's what PLAY PULSE is all about. PLAY PULSE is a barometer as to how well we as a society are doing to connect with the wide-ranging benefits of play and leisure time across age groups and interest areas.



Physical Activity: The Wonder Drug

“Physical Activity really is a wonder drug. It makes you healthier and happier; you live longer.”

Thomas Frieden, Director of the CDC

DOWNSIDE

- *The Lancet*, the leading publication of global health, called physical inactivity “a pandemic with far-reaching health, economic, environmental and social consequences.”
- The World Health Organization (WHO) ranks physical inactivity as the 4th leading cause of death.
- According to Dr. James Levine, a Mayo Clinic endocrinologist and leading researcher on the health hazards of sitting too much suggests that “sitting is the new smoking” as more people die of inactivity than smoking; 5.3 million vs. 5.0 million.
- Childhood obesity has leveled off among preschoolers in the U.S., but obesity remains a serious problem for children and adolescents aged 2-19 years. (*Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA)*).

UPBEAT

Positive Health Outcomes. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) states regular physical activity is one of the most important things you can do for your health. Here is a list of benefits provided by the CDC:

- Control your weight
- Reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease
- Reduce your risk for type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome
- Reduce your risk of some cancers
- Reduces your risk for high blood pressure
- Strengthen your bones and muscles
- Improve your mental health and mood
- Reduces the risk of depression and anxiety
- Improve your ability to do daily activities and prevent falls
- Increase your chances of living longer

Smarter and Healthier Kids. A 2015 Active Living Research study found that regular participation can have academic performance benefit. For instance, single sessions of physical activity can enhance attention and memory and the effects of physical activity on brain health may be linked to improvements in academic performance.

Better Memory. In a 2011 study published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, Canadian researchers evaluated the cognitive function of elderly people, and reported that those that were most active scored better.

More Confidence. A survey published in the journal *Human Resource Management* found that people who exercised frequently during the week felt more confident in balancing their work and home life than others.

ACTION

Join the Voices. ‘Recess Moms’ in Florida have moved closer to getting their elementary children 20 minutes of recess every day under a bill that unanimously passed a Florida House education panel.

Part of Daily Routine. The CDC has a number of good action steps, including making a family walk a part of daily routine and taking young people to places such as public parks or courts where children can be active. (<http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/adding-pa/activities-children.html>)

Fun Ways of Physical Activity. PHIT America, a non-profit dedicated to increasing activity among Americans, has a list of 40 Fun Ways to be Physically Active. Rolling down hills is a long forgotten play activity that found its way onto the list. (http://www.phitamerica.org/Benefits_of_Activity/BENEFITS_OF_PLAY_TIME/40_Ways_Kids.html)

Get a Group Together. Whether it be the neighborhood or the workplace, get a group of people together to walk during lunch hour, pre-work hours, or after dinner. It helps to be responsible to others for your physical activity.

Twofer. Consider the recommended action in the two other featured areas of this Play Pulse. Take a walk in the park and you will improve physical health and alleviate the stress of boredom. Nothing but a win-win when combining the boredom and nature suggestions.

BOREDOM: GOOD OR NOT SO GOOD?

It is likely that you have overheard children complaining about being bored and even adults exclaiming they are “bored to death.” *Boredom is the desire yet the inability to engage in an enjoyable activity.*

Yes, boredom can take the pleasure out of one’s day or week, but it also has other more health-related consequences. It is not healthy to be bored too often.

There is other research exploring boredom that suggests there are positive outcomes for being bored. Being bored can actually be a good thing for people and more especially for children who have not learned how to deal with being bored.

Actually, we need to live with a ‘boredom balance’.

DOWNSIDE

Bored to Death? When we are bored we are more likely to eat poorly, abandon exercise, suppress anger, struggle with stress related problems, or embrace alcohol or drugs (including cigarettes).

Some of the research shows boredom to be responsible for an increased risk of the following:

- Drug and alcohol abuse/dependence
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Poor academic performance
- Poor interpersonal skills
- Feelings of anger
- Aggression

- Obsessive-Compulsive tendencies
- Somatization
- Interpersonal sensitivity

(Risk taking Sommers J, Vodanovich SJ. Boredom proneness: its relationship to psychological- and physical health symptoms. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*. 2000 Jan;56 (1):149-55.)

UPBEAT

Here’s where the balance comes into the equation. We often think of being bored as a less than desirable state of mind and it can be, but there are also some positive outcomes associated with boredom.

Leads to Creativity. When minds take a break from the continual stimulation of today’s world, it allows the mind to better take in new things and have more original thoughts, which can boost creativity. Neuroscience research by Mann and Cadman at University of Central Lancashire and Gasper and Middlewood at Penn State has even found that daydreaming involves the same processes that govern imagination and creativity.

Discover New Habits and Interests. If you use the extra energy you have when you are bored to try a new activity, you’ll enjoy your time and learn something, whereas if you’re just scrolling through Instagram, you won’t really have gained much. Make the most of your time by letting yourself be bored.

ACTION

Become Aware of Boredom. When you are bored, rather than rush to the refrigerator or skip your regularly scheduled physical activity, consider that you might just be bored and decide to either welcome it as a mental ‘time out’ or choose to do something fun to offset the feeling.

Taking Time to be Bored. Recall that boredom can play a positive influence on well-being and welcome the boredom as a bit of time to chill, relax, and see where it leads. Rather than automatically turning to your phone to play word games with your friends or solitaire with yourself, try turning off the phone for a while. This is especially true for some children who are not accustomed to being bored.

New Pleasurable Pursuits. If boredom appears to be a more extensive feeling than just temporary, then make a more thoughtful decision to pursue something really new to your schedule. Take music lessons, buy craft materials, learn to play pickle ball or borrow a bike or board game from the neighbors.

NATURE: IT'S A NATURAL

We rarely think of our human origins as evolving from hunters and gatherers who roamed the outside world in search of basic human requirements such as food and shelter. Just because most of us no longer have to roam and gather doesn't mean that we have lost our need for being outside. Nature and our contact with the natural elements are good things.

UPBEAT

Much of the research about nature and well-being has been around for a while. A University of Minnesota web site, *Taking Charge of Your Health and Wellbeing*, details the following benefits associated with human contact with nature.

- Being in nature, or even viewing scenes of nature, reduces anger, fear, and stress and increases pleasant feelings
- Exposure to nature contributes to physical well-being, reducing blood pressure, heart rate, and muscle tension.
- Research conducted in hospitals, offices, and schools found that even a simple plant in a room can have a significant impact on stress and anxiety.
- Hospital specific research reported that patients with a window view of a green-laden outdoor space experienced less pain and recovered more quickly.
- University of Chicago residents living in public housing with trees and green space around their building resulted in residents who knew more people, had strong feelings of unity with neighbors, and helped and supported one another more than residents living without the influence of nature.
- University of Chicago also found that in addition to this greater sense of community, these residents had a reduced risk of street crime, lower levels of violence and aggression between domestic partners, and a better capacity to cope with life's demands, especially the stresses of living in poverty.
- In a 2011 study published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, time in front of a screen was associated with a higher risk of death, and that was independent of physical activity!

(<http://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/enhance-your-wellbeing/environment/nature-and-us/what-our-relationship-nature>)

DOWNSIDE

When adding up all the time that the average American spends with electronic media including TV, computers, smart phones, radio, etc., Nielsen's Total Audience Report indicates that Americans aged 18 and older spend more than 11 hours a day watching TV, listening to the radio, or using smart-phones and other electronic devices. Most people are awake for only 16 to 18 hours per day.

Research shows that the average American spends 87% of their time in enclosed buildings and 6% of their time in enclosed vehicles (Journal of Exposure Analysis and Environmental Epidemiology (2001) 11, 231-252). This represents a total of 93% of the average Americans life spent inside (US EPA Indoor Air Report).

Forty-four percent of parents desire their children to play outside more. Why? The time this generation of parents spent outdoors as children was nearly twice that of today's children (Soc Sci Med. 2015 May; 133:253-60.10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.10.033. Epub 2014 Oct 19).

ACTION

There are a number of actions or activities that can increase your contact with nature and access the positive attributes of such contact.

- Simple things such as opening a window, adding a plant, looking out the window at trees and grass.
- Have a picnic. Doesn't have to be fancy, picnics can be a bag lunch eaten outdoors or a simple dinner eaten in the back yard or on the porch.
- Walk a dog. If you don't have one, borrow one from a friend or neighbor.
- Visit a park. It can be a local park where adults can walk while children play. A state park where visitors can picnic, fish and hike, or a national park where people can take in the wonders of the natural world. Parks are there for the people.

The US Play Coalition is a partnership to promote the value of play throughout life. We are an international network of individuals and organizations that recognize play as a valuable and necessary part of a healthy and productive life. Our membership is diverse – including educators, parents, physicians, health scientists, park and recreation professionals, psychologists, landscape architects and many more. We have several publications and offer grants for PLAY research and action.

Membership is free; join online today.

For more information, find us online at usplaycoalition.org

Contact us:

*Email: usplaycoalition@clemson.edu
Phone 864.656.2525*

