



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

The Power, the Promise, the Potential, and the Possibilities of PLAY. Play means different things to different people and often it is just taken for granted as something that occurs, but there is a whole substance to PLAY that is relatively unknown, and the U. S. Play Coalition would like to share some of that substance with you...

CHILDHOOD

UPBEAT: Play, particularly play that is child-centered rather than adult directed, provides opportunities for the child to grow, develop, and acquire ways to interact with the world in which they live.

ACTION: If your school system does not provide time for recess for its elementary-aged students, use the CDC recommendations as a tool to make changes in that policy.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

UPBEAT: What's a simple thing that we all could do that costs nothing or very little and pays off in a big way? Move more! It's a basic health prescription.

ACTION: Take a look at your typical day and identify small ways you can incorporate more physical activity into your daily routine so it becomes almost effortless, i.e. take the stairs at work or stores, park your car farther away from your destination, every little bit helps.

HAPPY AND HEALTHY ADULTS

UPBEAT: Continual change is the way of life in the 21st Century society. Thankfully, play is a great way for adults to adapt to that stress.

ACTION: Recognize your need to sit in front of a screen for 20 minutes to relax and escape, but don't make that your only activity. Get up from the couch or chair and move on to an activity that is more engaging for you rather than just entertaining.

MATURE ADULTS

UPBEAT: Aging is an ongoing process for all of us. It can be a time of growth and enjoyment and with the large number of Americans aging into a mature lifestyle, play that involves challenge, contact with others, and physical activity. All actions that are a real boon to the aging process.

ACTION: Make a concerted effort to stay connected as socialization relates to the well-being of all of us. Make sure that friends and loved ones, most especially those who are older, get out of the house, encounter new experiences, and keep up with grandchildren or young adults.

NATURE

UPBEAT: Most of us have green or natural space around us or somewhere that we can access either easily or with some planning. Get outside. Sit under a tree. Count the stars. All of these activities can be good times that are good for you as well.

ACTION: Outdoor walking/biking trails are becoming popular in cities, suburbs, and even rural areas. Support your elected officials as they start to develop or expand these wonderful outdoor spaces. Your voice matters.

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This publication is produced by the US Play Coalition. Thank you and be PLAYful!

For further analysis of each of these Pulse Points, you can view the full report.

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.



CHILDHOOD

OUR CHILDREN...

How do they discover the world around them? Where are they able to test their abilities? How do they learn to make friends? What experiences result in their resilience and independence?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention when recommending recess for students cites the following benefits: increased level of physical activity, improved memory, greater attention and concentration; reduced disruptive behavior in the classroom; and improved their social and emotional development, e.g. learning to share and negotiate.

Dr. Peter Gray, research professor at Boston College and expert on the evolution of childhood play, presents scientific evidence that self-directed learning and free play permit children to realize their optimum abilities to learn, grow, and develop naturally and positively. He indicates that “playing with other children, away from adults, is how children learn to make their own decisions, control their emotions and impulses, see from others’ perspectives, negotiate difference with others, and make friends.”

Reviewed research in the article “The Need for Pretend Play” featured in *Psychology Today* suggested that make-believe games are forerunners of self-regulation in children including reduced aggression, delayed gratification, civility, and empathy.

Play for children is the gaining of life. - Joseph Lee, Father of the American Playground Movement

PHYSICAL HEALTH AND ACTIVITY

You may not have time to “exercise” but if you build pleasant physical activities into your life you won’t need to set aside additional time. - Robert Ornstein, Ph.D. and David Sobel, M.D.

What ever happened to physical activity? We’ve lost physical activity to the advances of modern life. Most children no longer walk to school. Adults are working longer hours in sedentary jobs. Push lawn mowers have gone the way of the dinosaur and “screens of all types” have taken over much of our leisure time. It doesn’t matter what your age might be. Everybody needs to be physically active to maintain health.

PHYSICAL INACTIVITY IS A PANDEMIC.

This statement calling physical inactivity a pandemic is from *The Lancet*, an expert in global health as cited by PHIT America. PHIT America goes on to share additional facts including that 82.7 million Americans are totally sedentary, a 17.5% increase since 2007. There are also 10 million totally sedentary children in this country. They go on to recount that an additional 33 million children are not active enough to reach a healthy standard.

THE MANY BENEFITS OF MODERATE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.

The American Heart Association lists numerous benefits of moderate physical activity including: improved blood circulation, weight control, improved cholesterol and high blood pressure. Physical activity also helps manage stress, promote enthusiasm and optimism as well as provides a way to share time with family and friends.

LACK OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTH IMPACT.

Science News reported that approximately 36% of American adults do not engage in any leisure-time physical activity. Lack of physical activity accounts for 22% of coronary heart disease, 22% of colon cancer, 18% of osteoporotic fractures, 12% of diabetes and hypertension, and 5% of breast cancer.

STAGGERING COSTS.

In addition to the health consequences and heartaches associated with such diseases, the National League of Cities reports that the annual health care costs of obesity-related illnesses are \$190 billion which is almost 21% of annual health spending in the United States. This group also cites that childhood obesity alone amounts to \$14 billion in direct medical costs.

Physical activity really is a wonder drug. It makes you healthier and happier, you live longer. - Thomas Frieden, Director of the CDC

HEALTHY AND HAPPY ADULTS

When people engage in leisure activity, they have lower stress levels, better mood, a lower heart rate and more psychological engagement - that means less boredom, which can help avoid unhealthy behaviors, for you.

- Health Psychologist and Professor Matthew Zawadzki

Less than 20 years into a new millennium and our country and its residents have experienced many changes. We have cell phones, commuting, and car pools. Medical and technological advances have likely made for improvement in our quality of life - or have they?

DECLINE IN LIFE EXPECTANCY.

In the *CIA World Factbook 2015*, the United States ranked 43rd out of 224 countries for life expectancy. A report from the National Center for Health Statistics indicated that life expectancy in the United States had declined by a little more than a month for the first time in the last two decades and is now 78.8 years.

AMERICANS' HAPPINESS RATING.

The World Happiness Report compiled by the United Nations found that the United States, one of the more economically rich countries, ranks #15 on the Happiness Scale; this level has gone down since 2005. Most European countries received higher rankings.

LEISURE TIME USAGE.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Report, Americans have nearly 5 hours per day for leisure (4 hours 59 minutes). Out of that time, they spend almost 3 hours watching TV (2 hours and 47 minutes) with 41 minutes socializing/communicating and 18% in exercise, sports, and recreation.

VACATIONS AMERICAN STYLE.

Previous research conducted by Project: Time Off found our nation's vacation usage had fallen to 16.0 days a year which is nearly a full week less than the average between 1978 and 2000. American workers took 16.2 days of vacation and more than half of the Americans surveyed left unused vacation days.

YOUR HEART AND HEALTH AND HAPPINESS.

More than 65 years ago in Massachusetts, doctors began a longitudinal study that would transform our understanding of heart disease. The Framingham Heart Study, which started with more than 5,000 people and continues to this day, has become a data source for not just heart disease, but also for insights about weight loss (adjusting your social network helps people lose weight), genetics (inheritance patterns), and even happiness (living within a mile of a happy friend has a 25% chance of making you happier).

The foundation of success in life is good health: that is the substratum fortune; it is also the basis of happiness. A person cannot accumulate a fortune very well when he is sick. - P. T. Barnum

MATURE ADULTS

We don't stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing. - George Bernard Shaw

Older adults are one of the fastest growing age groups in this country. For both social, economic, and humane reasons, it is in society's best interest that we support these individuals to maintain their health, intellect, and love of life. How do we keep them physically active, socially connected, mentally sharp, and enjoying this life stage?

According to the Census Bureau, mature adults are a rapidly growing group as Americans ages 65 and older number 46.2 million which translates into 14.5% of the population or one in seven Americans, and those numbers are increasing every day.

Experts believe that physically active older adults who are socially engaged and intellectually stimulated not only extend the years in their lives, but the life and enjoyment of those years. This premise is based upon society's ability to address a number of conditions prevalent among mature adults that threaten the enjoyment and productivity of this life stage.

THE ROLE OF CHRONIC CONDITIONS.

The National Council on Aging reports the following:

- Approximately 92% of older adults have at least two chronic diseases. Four chronic diseases - heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes - cause almost two-thirds of all deaths each year.
- Chronic diseases account for 75% of the money our nation spends on health care.
- One in four older adults experience some mental disorder including depression and anxiety disorders, and dementia with this number expected to double to 15 million by 2030.
- The number of older adults with substance abuse problems is expected to double to five million by 2020.

THE ROLE OF PLAY FOR MATURE ADULTS.

According to the National Institute of Aging, older people who lose their mobility have higher rates of disease, disability, and death. A substantial body of research has shown the benefits of regular physical activity for a variety of populations and health conditions.

- **20 MINUTE WALK STAVES OFF DISABILITY.** According to findings by the Lifestyle Interventions and Independence for Elders (LIFE) Study, which studied 1,635 adults ages 70-89 years, those who walked 20-minutes per day helped these seniors hold off major disability and enhanced the quality of their life. The result of the daily walks in this group was a 28% reduction in long-term mobility loss. Participants were followed for an average of 2.6 years.

The Alzheimer's Association reports that the number of Americans living with Alzheimer's disease is growing and growing rapidly. They estimate that there are 5.4 million adults with this disease and 5.2 million of them are ages 65 and older.

- **ALZHEIMER'S AND THE ARTS.** Researchers from George Mason University conducted a study at an assisted living facility in VA to examine the impact of the arts on cognitive and emotional functioning. Researchers' evidence showed that the arts can improve cognitive function and memory, reduce stress, and bolster a person's mood.

Psychologists at Brigham Young University and the University of Utah found that social isolation (both actual and perceived) may be more deadly than obesity as social isolation and feelings of loneliness increase a person's chance of premature death by 14% which is nearly double the risk of early death from obesity.

- **SENIOR CENTERS AND LONELINESS.** According to research reported in the study, Senior Centers in the 21st Century, a study of 734 senior center participants reported the following about their participation: almost half felt less lonely (46%), laughed more frequently (49%), reduced their level of stress (48%), felt more satisfied with life (43%), and have increased or started exercise regularly (40%).

Play for grown people is the renewal of life. - Joseph Lee

NATURE

While street trees, parks, and public green spaces are often regarded as mere amenities - ways to beautify our communities and make life a little more pleasant, the science tells us they play a central role in health and healthy functioning.

- Frances E. Kuo, Professor, University of Illinois

Nature is a central component of health and happiness. Where do people go to picnic?

Why do people often plan vacations for the lake, the sea, or the mountains? Where do we go to hike and bike? How do parents take their children to playgrounds?

The many roles that nature can and does play in the lives of people and communities encompass many important aspects of life. While many of us recognize the various ways in which people of all ages are drawn to green spaces and natural settings for the pleasure and enjoyment they bring. The benefits accrued to individuals and society are often less well known. Such examples include:

THE HEALING EFFECT OF NATURE.

As far back as the 1980s, researchers were studying the effect of hospitalized patients on the basis of whether or not their hospital windows featured a view of trees or brick walls. Replicated studies concurred that people who are exposed to natural scenes aren't just happier or more comfortable, they recover more quickly and spend less time in the hospital.

POSITIVE ECONOMIC IMPACT.

The Trust for Public Land's economic analysis in Long Island revealed that the state's parks and open space provide a \$2.74 billion annual economic benefit to local governments and taxpayers, and that conservation of Long Island's parks and open space is eight times less costly than new residential development.

MOOD ENHANCER.

Project Evergreen references studies by horticulture therapists that refer to gardening as a healthy, active pursuit both physically and emotionally. Horticulture therapists have determined that gardening provides a form of emotional expression and release, and it helps people connect with others.

HEALTH BENEFITS.

According to *Grower Talks*, there is growing evidence that horticulture is important on a human level. Plants lower blood pressure, reduce muscle tension related to stress, improve attention and reduce feelings of fear and anger or aggression.

LOWERED VANDALISM AND ENHANCED SELF-ESTEEM.

Information provided by Project Evergreen reported that studies conducted over a 30-year period in communities, neighborhoods, housing projects and prisons show that when landscaping projects are promoted there is a definite increase in self-esteem and a decrease in vandalism.

Nature holds the key to our aesthetic, intellectual, cognitive and even spiritual satisfaction. - E. O. Wilson

HONORING JOE FROST, THE CONTEMPORARY FATHER OF PLAY ADVOCACY

Joe Frost is one of America's leading experts on play and playgrounds and is known the world over as the contemporary father of play advocacy. Joe has been an influential member of the U.S. Play Coalition's steering committee since its humble beginnings. He has served as a speaker and moderator at the start up 2009 Summit on the Value of Play and at other subsequent conferences. Also, he has served as honorary conference chair for each successive play conferences. Joe Frost has been an influencer for our organization's work as well as for the world of play. Along with his wife Betty, Joe attends U.S. Play Coalition events whenever he can!

At the 2017 Conference on the Value of Play: Where Design Meets Play, the U.S. Play Coalition will present the inaugural **Joe L. Frost Award for Distinguished Research**. This is to be awarded annually in recognition of an individual's body of exceptional research that has enhanced and expanded the study of play. It only makes sense that Joe will be the first recipient!

The U.S. 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 please visit www.usplaycoalition.clemson.edu or contact us by email at usplaycoalition@clemson.edu or by phone at 864.656.2525.