



## **Saving our Kiwi Kids from a Future of Lifestyle Diseases and Obesity**

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**FROM: The New Zealand Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs)**

**The obesity and inactivity rates in NZ and worldwide are alarming. What can be done about these trends to save our kids from a life of battling lifestyle diseases and obesity?**

Local statistics show the prevalence of obesity in children and young people in NZ and worldwide is increasing, with the 2006/07 New Zealand Health Survey finding that:

- One in twelve children (aged 2 to 14 years) were obese (8.3%)
- One in five children were overweight (20.9%).

Overseas statistics are no better with a tripling of the number of children who are overweight or obese in the last 30 years in the US.

The World Health Organisation has long identified the major links between childhood obesity and chronic diseases in adulthood. Their research suggests overweight children are more likely to be overweight or obese as adults, increasing the risk of developing diabetes, heart problems and high blood pressure. This makes getting our childhood obesity problem under control more important as it is not something that we can expect kids to naturally 'grow out of'.

"Obesity is a serious problem and it's getting worse," says Dr Louise Signal who is director and lead researcher of several studies from the Health Promotion and Policy Research Unit (University of Otago, Wellington). "Our research shows that it's a significant health issue that will have huge costs for the public health system in the future from diseases such as diabetes. Physical inactivity often plays a key role in the development of obesity, and obesity often impacts negatively on an individual's level of physical activity. It can be a difficult cycle to break".

Perhaps it's no surprise that in NZ our kids are not as active as they once were with the same NZ survey finding that only 55.2 percent of young people aged 15 to 24 met guidelines for physical activity (that is they had completed at least 30 minutes of exercise on five or more days of the past week).

If that hasn't got you worried, then a recent report issued by the Healthy Schools Campaign (HSC) and Trust for America's Health (TFAH) will. They are examining the connection between disparities in fitness and academic performances and outcomes, in an effort to understand the impact that one may have on the other, and to close the achievement gap. This research is uncovering that obesity and inactivity does not just have the immediate health impacts mentioned above.

All this research points clearly to a problem that needs to be solved at a national and international level, but what can we do right now as parents and caregivers of the next generation?

The Ministry of Health recommends that Children and young people should:

- Throughout each day, do sixty minutes or more of moderate to vigorous physical activity
- Be active in as many ways as possible, for example, through play, cultural activities, dance, sport, recreation, jobs and going from place to place
- Be active with friends and whanau, at home, school and in their communities
- Spend less than two hours a day (out of school hours) in front of the television, computers, and game consoles.

FitnessNZ in conjunction with REPs have developed *Guidelines for Children in Exercise Facilities* to ensure children have fun in a safe environment when they use gyms or recreation centres. As REPs Registered Exercise Facilities are required to follow these guidelines, it is important to choose a REPs Registered Exercise Facility to ensure you receive the safest exercise advice for both you and your child.

The guidelines recommended that all facilities that provide exercise programmes to children have systems and processes in place to ensure they are safe and supervised at all times. Supervision ratios vary depending on the age and activities of the children.

Everybody involved in the delivery of exercise programmes to children should be qualified and registered with the New Zealand Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs). Registration requires staff to be qualified and trained to understand children's exercise needs, and includes a range of other requirements, such as a police criminal record check.

#### **Contact Details:**

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#### **What is the NZ Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs)?**

REPs is an independent non profit organisation administrating the New Zealand exercise professionals register to ensure that the public receive safe and effective exercise advice.

Using REPs Registered Exercise Professionals is the "Warrant of Fitness Check" that an exercise professional and facility meet New Zealand and international standards to deliver exercise advice and instruction. REPs is affiliated globally to over 35 other national exercise professional registers through the International Confederation of Registers for Exercise Professionals (ICREPs) [www.icreps.org](http://www.icreps.org).

