



**Teen girls are disengaged from physical activity:** Multiple studies show that as girls go through puberty their physical activity drops significantly.

**Five key findings for the importance of physical activity for adolescent girls.**

- decreases risk of illicit drug use<sup>1</sup>
- decreases risk of teen pregnancy<sup>2</sup>
- increases self-efficacy<sup>1</sup>
- reduces stress, anxiety, and suicidality<sup>5</sup>
- improves concentration and working memory<sup>3</sup>

**Summary**

As adolescent girls age, there is a decrease in their interest and willingness to partake in physical activity (PA)<sup>5</sup>. A plethora of empirical evidence highlights how important PA is for adolescents' physical and mental health<sup>4</sup>. However, results show that many teen girls do not enjoy traditional sports that are highly competitive<sup>1</sup>. In addition, the lack of equal access to sports opportunities in high schools can limit adolescent participation<sup>1</sup>. This unequal access stems from many high schools catering to sports that are highly competitive and involve contact<sup>1</sup>. Whereas studies show, teen girls enjoy sports that emphasize fun<sup>6</sup>.

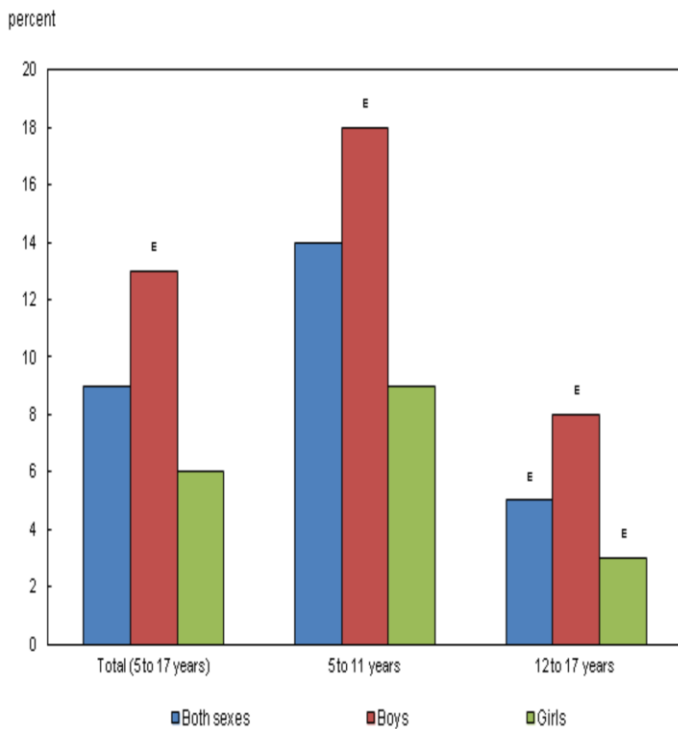


Surveys find teen girls enjoy<sup>1</sup>:

- Yoga
- Archery
- Dance
- Gymnastics
- Ballet

**This graph highlights that as girls age their physical activity decreases.**

The graphs reflects that less than four percent of girls ages 12 to 17 meet the PA recommendations<sup>7</sup>.



**Options to address this issue:**

- Offer diverse sports options at schools<sup>1</sup>
- Ask teens what physical activities they want to have available<sup>6</sup>
- Place importance on fun and participation instead of competitiveness<sup>1</sup>
- Subsidizing costs for participation in sports<sup>1</sup>
- Reducing barriers to entry<sup>1</sup>

**Specific policy recommendation**

Based on the evidence, teen girls prefer activities where they feel they have autonomy. Therefore, when girls feel they have a choice in what sports they play in their P.E. class, they are more likely to participate<sup>6</sup>. One study allowed girls to share their input on what sports they would like to play, and they saw an increase in positive attitudes and participation<sup>6</sup>.

This solution is critical to implement because it will drastically increase the amount of PA teen girls achieve. Also, this recommendation is cost-effective as adding a yoga and or dance class to high school P.E. is not expensive<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, these activities are safe for teen girls to perform as they do not increase the risk of severe injuries, compared to sports like football<sup>1</sup>.

**Case Study: “Fit for Girls”<sup>6</sup>**

- The study's goal was to find out why girls felt disengaged from participating in PA<sup>6</sup>. The study used a questionnaire to identify which girls felt detached from the school's gym class. Next, they performed personal semi-structured interviews to understand how the girls felt. The researchers used the self-determination theory to assess why some girls enjoyed their school's P.E. class more than others. This framework found that the girls had three needs: feeling a sense of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. The researchers tracked disengaged girls for 18 months to monitor the effects of the intervention. The study's interventions provided girls with different choices in the activities. This led to increased participation and engagement in P.E. class.

## References

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