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Physical Fitness

Whose Responsibility?



Everyone associated with the school—administrators, teachers, nonteaching personnel, and parents—all have the responsibility of providing our young people with the training and environment necessary to help them learn and embrace sound health principles.



Optimal health occurs only when all body parts function in harmony and efficiency. Many people think of health as simply the absence of disease, but in its truest sense, health is not passive but active; it requires the harmonious development of all body systems. With the combination of stress and sedentary life-style of most civilized nations, health cannot be taken for granted; it requires preparation and maintenance.

Is fitness the responsibility of school, home, or the individual?

This process should begin as early as possible. As educators we must instill in our students the desire to learn and practice health principles, both now and throughout their entire lives.

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Physical Education—Not Just Competition

For years a debate has dragged on in Adventist education concerning the proper role of physical education and the emphasis it should receive in the classroom. Unfortunately, the argument usually gets bogged down in spirited discussions about competition. Much more important, however, is the role physical education can play in establishing proper life-style principles that students will carry into their

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adult lives. Health and physical education should be synonymous and inseparable.

The development of the "whole child"—including the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual—should be a primary goal in education. Balance among these areas will ensure equilibrium in our children's development. Failure to balance these areas will result in less-than-optimal levels of performance in all areas of development.

Fitness for Everyone

Both teachers and students should study

the admonitions about health in the Bible and Mrs. White's writings. It is God's wish that we be healthy: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" (3 John 2). The importance of health is seen in Mrs. White's statement that "the health should be as sacredly guarded as the character."¹ From its very beginning, our church has recognized the inseparable link between the body and the soul. Our health message and hundreds of hospitals and clinics worldwide attest to our conviction about the

holistic nature of human life.

Students will see the value of physical fitness only if teachers and administrators sense the urgent need for exercise and make a determined effort to become fit themselves. For this to happen, every teacher needs to receive proper training in the developmental principles of fitness and then model and teach these principles in his or her contacts with students. Not only the health or physical education teacher, but every member of the school staff should exemplify physical fitness and the principles of healthful living.

To stay fit, teachers and administrators might meet after school for aerobics or other strenuous exercise. This has the benefit of enhancing physical conditioning, reducing the risk of heart attack and hypertension, and helping reduce stress and depression.

Fitness for Life

"Health is a great treasure. It is the richest possession mortals can have,"² wrote Ellen White. As God's stewards, we have a responsibility to carefully guard our health as well as our finances so that we can better serve Him. Students need to learn that principles of fitness and good health will make them feel better now and benefit them both physically and spiritually in later life.

The U.S. Surgeon General has set a goal of having 60 percent of American adults regularly engaged in vigorous physical exercise by 1990.³ This goal will never be realized unless we help our students become health and fitness conscious.

Fitness cuts across all social barriers. While one culture may prefer a particular type of exercise or sport over another, every ethnic group and nation must find ways to help its people become and stay fit.

Practical Strategies

How can the philosophical principles of fitness be translated into classroom results? Physical education teachers have a special responsibility to teach students about fitness. If they have not received special training in this area, they can obtain additional information from workshops at local universities and colleges; or contact the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance for guidelines.

The American College of Sports Medicine has guidelines for exercise programs that apply to everyone, regardless of age or current health status. Briefly, the guidelines for healthy individuals involve exercises that are cardiovascular in nature. Performed at least five times weekly, these exercises should raise the heart rate to training levels of 60 to 70 percent of its maximum level⁴ for at least 15-60 min-

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utes, and should be accompanied by warm-up and cool-down exercises.

Physical fitness involves more than just heart rate, however. Other important aspects include muscular strength and endurance, flexibility, balance, agility, and percent of body fat. While team sports such as soccer, basketball, or volleyball may contribute to the development of some of these components, these sports require many people, and therefore should not be counted upon for fitness training. Even the hours spent in refining movements in gymnastics should form only part of an integrated fitness program. Students should learn to enjoy a variety of physical activities that they can continue to pursue throughout their lives.

How to Begin

The first few weeks of the school year should be spent developing overall fitness in students through physical education classes. This prepares them for a pretest of physical fitness approximately six weeks into the first semester. Activities such as progressive walking, jogging, cycling, swimming, and weight training (not lifting) increases cardiovascular endurance and helps students get in shape to learn new activities. Textbooks that provide schedules for introductory fitness programs are sold at university and shopping mall bookstores in the physical education, fitness, or health sections.

A posttest of physical fitness at the end of the school year can help the teacher assess the physical fitness program. It will also let students know how well they are progressing toward their goals. A final test also gives administrators some input on how their students compare with others the same age. An excellent test to administer is the President's Test for Physical Fitness. Kenneth Cooper's 1.5 mile run/walk can also be used to measure cardiovascular fitness.⁵ Both tests include norms.

Unique, Individualized, and Fun

The key to successful school fitness programs is to make them unique, individualized, and *fun*. Providing students with a variety of choices can prevent boredom. Aerobic movement, cycling, jogging, walking, jumping rope, and swimming are some traditional activities that provide fitness training. Stationery cycling, stair climbing, weight training, and continuous moving games add variety to the program. Sports such as tennis,

racquetball, volleyball, soccer, and sailing are other alternatives. Students should be taught to keep records of their fitness workouts and progress.

At first, if activities differ from what has been done before, the teacher may encounter some student resistance to the physical education classes and activities. Various incentives may be offered to encourage students to participate, such as awards or certificates for certain levels of achievement.

Fitness for Girls

Sports and fitness are not just for boys! By offering a variety of interesting activi-

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ties, and stressing the connection between fitness, health, and physical attractiveness, the teacher can encourage girls to become involved in active pursuits.

Every student should be encouraged to participate and improve his or her level of fitness, as well as to make a commitment to a lifetime of good health. The teacher should take the students at their current level of fitness, and help them improve through an individualized program of activities. These programs can be adjusted to meet the needs of handicapped or overweight students and those suffering from acute illnesses such as asthma or diabetes, as well as children with temporary disabilities.

Individualizing a fitness program to meet the needs of each child works particularly well in small or multigrade schools. Talent, size, weight, and skill are not barriers if the teacher helps each child to develop a personal schedule of development. Students can be trained to take such vital measurements as percent of body fat, body girth measurements, and weight, and can even help their families achieve fitness. While traditional group activities can still be utilized in the small school's physical education program, allowances can and should be made for students who work at different rates. Teacher preparation, zeal, and good record keeping are the only prerequisites

for a creative fitness program.

To reinforce the concepts learned, the physical education instructor can work together with the health teacher to help students understand the connection between fitness and nutrition, proper use of water, hygiene, sunshine, fresh air, exercise, moderation, and trust in God.

Teachers have the opportunity to extend their influence into eternity by helping young people become committed to the lifelong development of their physical, mental, social, and spiritual faculties. □

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REFERENCES

¹ Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Assn., 1923), p. 147.

² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³ *Promoting Health/Preventing Disease: Public Health Service Implementation Plans for Attaining the Objectives for the Nation*, Public Health Service, 1980: *Ibid.*, 98 (September-October 1983 supplement), pp. 155-167.

⁴ Maximum heart rate can be calculated by subtracting one's age from 220.

⁵ Kenneth Cooper, *The Aerobics Way* (New York: M. Evans and Company, Inc., 1970).

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as well. Feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment are just as important to a child as the elation grownups experience when they get their first job, celebrate an anniversary, or successfully complete a difficult project at work. For a growing child, however, there is an added benefit: success in play means increased peer acceptance and self-esteem. Even if Mary is "just a girl," if she can hit the ball well or shoot baskets accurately, she will be accepted by all the fifth and sixth grade boys. All children want to be like Mary—successful and popular. They need opportunities to succeed in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains in order to achieve optimal personal growth. Physical education, when properly taught, helps the child become more agile, graceful, physically skilled, healthy, and socially adept.

Settling Disagreements

An emergency plan for settling disagreements needs to be established before beginning any kind of game. Students need to learn to disagree agreeably. Discuss with them how to solve social or game rule emergencies.