



Save the Children's Afterschool Program – Healthy Choices Component

Healthy eating and regular physical activity play a powerful role in preventing chronic diseases, including heart disease, cancer, and stroke – the three leading causes of death among adults aged 18 years or older. Engaging children in healthy eating and physical activity can help lower their risk for obesity and related chronic diseases during adulthood as well as provide immediate benefits during their developmental years. For example,

- Proper nutrition promotes optimal growth and development of children.
- Eating a healthy breakfast is associated with improved cognitive function (especially memory), reduced absenteeism, and improved mood.
- Regular physical activity helps build and maintain healthy bones and muscles, reduces feelings of depression and anxiety and promotes psychological well-being, and may help improve students' academic achievement, such as concentration and attentiveness in the classroom.

Childhood obesity has more than doubled in children and tripled in adolescents in the past 30 years, and in 2010, more than one third were overweight or obese. Children and adolescents who are obese have a 70-80% chance of becoming overweight or obese adults.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans provide recommendations for children's intake of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, dairy, and protein, and maximum intake of sodium and calories from added sugars and solid fats. The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommends that children participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity daily. Unfortunately, many children do not meet these guidelines.

Schools and afterschool programs are in a unique position to provide opportunities for children to learn about and practice healthy eating and physical activity. Save the Children's afterschool program, which focuses on literacy, includes a Healthy Choices component which is 30 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily except one day each week which is a 15 minute nutrition education lesson followed by a 15 minute nutrition-themed game. The objectives are to increase children's aerobic capacity (health-related fitness) and nutrition knowledge, and pre- and post-testing is used accordingly.

Save the Children uses the evidence-based Coordinated Approach to Child Health (CATCH) program. CATCH began as a university study in 1987 and has grown into a school and afterschool program that teaches children how to be healthy for a lifetime. CATCH was the largest school-based health promotion study ever funded in the U.S., and evidence from the main trial indicated that CATCH decreased fat consumption and increased physical activity among children and adolescents. CATCH has been extensively evaluated in over 100 scientific peer-reviewed publications since the main trial and is the most studied childhood program ever.

Specifically, Save the Children uses CATCH Kids Club (CKC) physical activity and nutrition education curricula designed for children in grades K-5 in afterschool and summer settings. In 1999-2000, CKC underwent pilot testing and formative evaluation in 16 afterschool sites in Texas, and its inclusive (everyone plays) philosophy was well-received by the children. CKC has been demonstrated to increase children's physical activity and nutrition knowledge and intentions. Save the Children supplements the CKC curricula with lessons and activities from other highly reputable sources such as U.S. Department of Agriculture, PBS Kids, and Activity Works.