Physical Activity Interventions in Schools for Improving Lifestyle in European Countries

Guidelines recommend 60 minutes per day 5 days per week levels of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) to promote optimal health for a child as well as avoid the risk of metabolic and cardiovascular diseases. Sport participation has also been found to be associated to psychological and social health benefits for youths. Schools have been identified as an ideal setting to modify unhealthy behaviours for two reasons: first, they are able to reach a majority of children and consequently reduce inequalities; and second, children spend a majority of their time at school. This systematic review summarised the evidence of school-based interventions aimed to promote, enhance and implement physical activity in European schools.

A total of 47 studies were included in this review. The majority of the included interventions were multicomponent and focused on physical activity as well as dietary habits and/or to reduce unhealthy or at-risk behaviours. Based on this review, “among the European school-based physical activity interventions retrieved by the search, a small number seemed to reach positive results in terms of decrease in BMI, the universally recognised parameter to define weight status.” However, most notable results were observed on metabolic parameters as well as physical fitness. This review therefore concludes that school-based physical activity interventions could be seen as an inexpensive, easy to implement and enjoyable type of interventions that have the potential to reach a large proportion of children and adolescents.