Fat vs Fit: How Parents Can Make the Difference
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To be or not to be?

• Fat or fit? Which is better?
• Increased fat is associated with higher mortality and morbidity
• However, physical activity (PA) offers benefits independent of weight/fat reduction
• Fit is best at weight ranges up to obesity, lowering fat definitely a bonus.
The Problem with Children

- High levels of fat result from two primary causes:
- Energy in: ubiquitously high fat, often low nutrition diets linked to obesity
- Energy out: the average child expends ~ 500 calories less per day compared to 50 years ago
• Lower levels of physical activity (PA) + higher levels of sedentary “screen-time” behaviours (x box, computer, TV)
• = a new generation of “screenagers”
Coupled with the typical Western diet, these variables lead to the worst outcome for the child: both fat and unfit.
Leads us to Two Important Health Goals

• Improving Fit
• Preventing Fat

• In that order...

• Either will help independently; both would be awesome!
The Current Study

• Carers of 144 children (54% boys) completed a retrospective 7 day survey regarding PA, attitudes, screen time and BMI (as a marker of obesity)

• Two objectives:
  – What do parents do to get kids moving?
  – What makes kids fat?
Parental Influences

- Modelling vs support
Results

• No associations between modelling and child PA.

• Parental support accounted for 25% of the variance in kids PA.
  – Parent encouragement of child PA
  – Parent participating in PA with child
  – Parent transported child to PA
  – Parent watched child perform PA
Screen time vs PA

Television and junk food, two gut-busters that have helped 54 percent of all adults and 25 percent of all children become overweight in the United States
To our surprise

- PA and screen time not correlated
- PA and BMI not correlated
- Screen time and BMI showed the only association ($d = .38$)
  - In practical terms, normal weight kids spent on average 140 mins per week less on screens, compared to overweight kids.
Messages for Parents

• Idle time is dangerous for children’s weight – get them moving, anything is better than sitting.

• If parents want their kids to engage with PA, parents need to be enthusiastic and involved: drive, clap, encourage, do with, and take interest.