Lesson 1.1

Introduction to Physical Activity

Lesson Vocabulary
active aerobics, active recreation, active sports, aerobic, cool-down, exercise, flexibility exercises, lifestyle physical activities, lifetime activities, moderate activities, muscle, muscle fitness exercises, physical activity, vigorous activities, warm-up

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Like most teens, you probably know that you need to be physically active. But do you know why? Do you know what types of activities are best for you? When you finish this lesson, you’ll know the answers to these questions. You’ll also know more about good communication so that you understand what other people are saying and so that they understand what you mean.

What Is Physical Activity?

Physical activity occurs when your muscles contract to make your body move. Experts recommend that teens spend at least 60 minutes and up to several hours performing physical activity each day. The Physical Activity Pyramid for teens (see page 4) shows many types of physical activity from which you can choose. Ideally you would choose activities from each of the first three levels of the pyramid. You can combine activities from all three levels to meet the daily activity recommendation.

The activities at the bottom [first level] of the pyramid are called lifestyle physical activities because you do them as part of your daily life. Examples include walking to school, working around the house, and working in the yard. These physically beneficial lifestyle activities are called moderate activities because the intensity is not too easy and not too hard. Experts recommend that adults do moderate physical activity for 30 minutes or more each day. This is because activities from level 1 of the Physical Activity Pyramid help people reduce their risk of disease and help them maintain a healthy body weight. As you’ll learn later in this book, it’s recommended that teens do regular moderate activity to get the same benefits as adults and to develop activity habits that can last a lifetime.

Lifestyle and other moderate activities are sometimes called lifetime activities because you can do them when you’re young as well as when you grow older. Some activities from other levels of the pyramid are also considered to be lifestyle or lifetime activities. For example, certain sports such as bowling and golf and certain recreational activities such as fishing can be included in level 1 of the pyramid because they’re moderate in intensity. They can be considered lifetime activities because they can be done by people of all ages.

Activities at the second level of the teen pyramid include active aerobics and active sports and recreation. These activities are good for building physical fitness, especially cardiovascular fitness. They also provide health benefits similar to those of moderate lifestyle activities. The activities at the second level of the pyramid are considered vigorous activities because you use more energy doing these activities than you use when doing moderate lifestyle activities. Experts recommend that teenagers do these vigorous activities at least three days a week for 20 minutes. These activities make your heart beat faster and make you breathe faster than normal. Active sports and recreation activities, such as tennis and dancing, and active aerobics, such as aerobic dance, are considered to be lifetime activities because many people of all ages perform them.

Biking at moderate speeds is a lifestyle activity, but when done more vigorously, it can be considered an active aerobics activity or active recreation.
Active aerobics is a type of vigorous physical activity that is especially good for building cardiovascular fitness. The word aerobic means “with oxygen.” In aerobic activities, your body supplies oxygen to keep you going. Active aerobic activity is continuous activity that makes your heart beat faster than normal to supply your body with the oxygen it needs. Examples of active aerobic activities are running, swimming, in-line skating, aerobic dance, and biking at vigorous intensity.

The word active is used in combination with the terms aerobics, sports, and recreation when describing activities at the second level of the pyramid. This is to make it clear that activities at the second level are vigorous. Moderate lifestyle activities at the first level of the pyramid are also considered to be aerobic because your body can supply enough oxygen to allow you to keep doing these activities for long periods of time. But they’re not considered to be active aerobics because they’re not vigorous enough to build optimal levels of cardiovascular fitness.

Active sports and active recreation also require the heart to beat faster and breathing to be faster than normal. When done for at least 20 minutes at a time at least three days a week, these activities build cardiovascular fitness and provide health benefits. Examples of active sports are tennis, basketball, badminton, volleyball, and soccer. Examples of active recreation are hiking, backpacking, and recreational games such as Ultimate.

Exercise is a word used to describe physical activity that is done especially to build physical fitness. The third level of the teen activity pyramid describes exercises that are designed to build muscle fitness and flexibility. Experts recommend that teens do muscle fitness exercises (such as push-ups and curl-ups) at least two days a week and flexibility exercises (such as stretching) at least three days a week. Muscle fitness exercises help you to build strong bones and prevent muscle injury. Flexibility exercises also help you prevent injury.

At the top of the teen pyramid is inactivity. The pyramid provides a small space for this level to encourage teens to limit periods of unproductive inactivity. Examples of unproductive inactivity include time spent performing “light” activities such as watching TV and playing computer games. Too much unproductive inactivity isn’t good for your health or fitness. It can also limit your productivity in school and in performing other important daily tasks.

Inactivity as used in the pyramid doesn’t include productive rest, such as sleep that allows recovery from the day’s activities. For example, teens need at least nine hours of sleep each day. Teens also need time for relaxation and productive light activities, such as reading and doing homework.

The Physical Activity Pyramid for teens includes many types of activities.
The Physical Activity Pyramid is a guide to help you choose from a variety of activities and to help you determine the benefits of each. Depending on how you perform them, activities can be placed in different levels of the pyramid.

Flexibility exercises help you move the joints of your body freely so that you can perform many activities more effectively.

Gymnastics is an active sport, but performing on the pommel horse also builds muscle fitness.

Basketball is an active sport, but shooting baskets rather than playing a game is considered to be moderate activity.

Snowshoeing is a type of active recreation that can also be considered active aerobics when done vigorously.

The Physical Activity Pyramid is a guide to help you choose from a variety of activities and to help you determine the benefits of each. Depending on how you perform them, activities can be placed in different levels of the pyramid.
Why Do I Need Physical Activity?

Physical activities have many benefits. They help you to be healthy and to have good physical fitness. They can also help you look your best and enjoy yourself. Finding one or more physical activities that you enjoy helps you have fun and meet other people. Different kinds of physical activities have different benefits. Some of these benefits are described in later chapters of this book.

How Do I Start?

Before you start a physical activity such as playing a game or sport, it’s best to warm up. The warm-up helps you to get your heart, blood vessels, muscles, and other body systems ready so that they’ll work well and so that you won’t injure your muscles. It’s best to start with an activity such as slow jogging or fast walking. This part of the warm-up is called the “general warm-up” and gets the muscles warm. It’s sometimes called the “heart warm-up” because it also gets the heart ready for activity.

Experts recommend that you start with a general warm-up and then perform stretching exercises to warm up the muscles in several areas of your body. The calf stretch and the side stretch are examples of stretching exercises that you might use in a warm-up. Your teacher will show you other warm-up exercises, and you will learn more about stretching exercises in chapter 6.

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After your workout, it’s best not to stop abruptly. Do some slow jogging or fast walking to help the heart and the rest of your body cool down. This type of cool-down causes the muscles of the legs to act as pumps and push blood back to the heart. If you stop vigorous exercise too quickly, blood can collect in your legs for a longer time, resulting in a slower recovery.

Walking or slow jogging can serve as a general warm-up or cool-down (above right). A warm-up or cool-down also includes stretching exercises (above and below right).
Moving Together: Communication

Do you ever feel as though you really click with certain people? When they say something, you know just what they mean? When you tell them something, they really understand what you’re trying to say? Do you ever have times when plans get all messed up because you and your friends are not communicating?

Paulette just had a very bad day. When she got up in the morning, she realized she needed her clean workout clothes, and they were still rolled up in a ball in her gym bag. She was angry with herself for forgetting to wash them. When her mom asked her what was wrong, she snapped, “Never mind. It’s not your problem.” Then she felt bad about snapping at her mom.

When she got to first period, she was horrified when Mr. Jasper asked her to submit the first draft of her English assignment. She was sure he had said it was due tomorrow.

At lunch, Donte asked her if she wanted to shoot hoops after school. She liked basketball, but she couldn’t tell if he was asking her for real or just teasing her. Although Paulette thought it would be fun, she decided she didn’t want to be embarrassed if he was just kidding. She decided to play it safe by not going.

That evening, Donte called Paulette at home. “I waited for you on the court,” he said, sounding annoyed. “I thought you liked basketball.”

Paulette felt sick to her stomach because Donte really had wanted her to play and she missed her chance. She felt bummed out for the rest of the night.

Discussion Questions

1. What else could Paulette have said to her mom?
2. What could Paulette do next time to make sure she understands the English teacher’s expectations so that she isn’t surprised by the deadline?
3. Why do you think Paulette wasn’t sure if Donte was sincere about playing basketball?
4. What could Paulette do differently next time?
5. What could Donte do differently next time?

Guidelines for Effective Communication

Some strategies help us communicate better and avoid problems. You may do these already, but if you don’t, you should give them a try.

- **Focus on one thing at a time.** It’s hard to focus if you try to think about several things at once. Taking time to really focus on the person you are talking to helps your communication. Give your full attention when your teacher or friend is talking.

- **Write it down.** One reason for poor communication is that we sometimes forget what others have said. If the conversation is about something you have to do, or about an assignment, it’s good to write it down. Using a planner or notebook is better than writing it on a random slip of paper that might be misplaced. Make it a habit to check your list several times each day.

- **Ask if you have questions.** When you’re not sure if someone is kidding, it’s usually best to ask. For example, you might say, “Are you kidding me, or do you really mean it?” This may clear things up quickly.

- **Get the person’s attention.** When you really want to discuss something with someone, it helps to get the other person’s attention before you start to share your information. “Hey, James, I wanted to ask you something.” This kind of statement gets the person’s attention and increases the chance that the person will pay attention to you.

- **Look at the person you are talking to.** When someone is talking to you, let that person know you’re listening by looking at the person and nodding. Saying something back also helps. You might say, “If I heard you right, you said that you’re interested in going to the movie, but just not on Saturday.” Talking like this can feel strange at first, but it helps keep things straight.

- **Give your attention to others.** If you want others to pay attention to you, make sure you pay attention to them.

- **Take a minute to prepare.** In the late afternoon or early evening, take a minute to think about the next day and what you’ll need for your activities. This will help you be more prepared. It also leaves enough time to ask someone else for help when you need it.

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Activitygram

Activitygram is a computer program that helps you find out whether you get enough physical activity from each of the levels of the Physical Activity Pyramid for teens each day. Studies show that most teens become less active as they grow older and that many do not get enough activity for good health and fitness. Activitygram will show you whether you’re among the teens who are active or inactive.

You can learn more about Activitygram at the Fitness for Life: Middle School Web site. The Activitygram shown at right is a sample report generated for a typical 13-year-old girl who measured her activity patterns for three days.

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Take It Home

Friends and Family

“I didn’t hear you.”
“I heard you but I didn’t know what you meant.”
“Are you talking to me?”

Have you ever said any of these things? If you have, it means that you may be talking to someone else, but you’re not communicating. Communication means giving and receiving information. So if information is given but not received, you’re not really communicating.

Communicating with others happens all the time. Good communication helps people understand each other, and poor communication can cause us all sorts of problems. Maybe your mom didn’t know you hate purple (perhaps because you never told her), and now she’s given you something that you really dislike. You’re both frustrated. Or maybe your friend seemed to criticize your new haircut and then say she was just kidding. You don’t know what to think, and now you feel uptight.

Communicating with family and friends is important. Being active every day sometimes requires lots of support from people around you, and that requires good communication.

Maybe you need to ask someone for a ride to a game, or get your friends to agree on a time and place to meet. In most games, of course, you need to come to an agreement about the rules. To enjoy physical activity with family and friends, you need to know the kinds of activities they enjoy. All this takes lots of good communication.

Use the worksheet supplied by your teacher to talk to a friend or family member about the Physical Activity Pyramid. By asking questions and getting answers about activities you both like to perform, you’re communicating. Use the results of your communications to plan some special physical activities, such as a family walk or a bike ride with friends.

Lesson Review

► What is physical activity?
► Why do you need physical activity?
► What is a warm-up, and why is it necessary?
► What are some guidelines for effective communication?