
The yard at home and children’s physical activity

It is likely that many elements both within and outside the home may influence children’s physical activity and sedentary behaviours (e.g. TV viewing, computer games). Features of the home physical environment that may have an important influence on physical activity include: yard size, play or sporting equipment (e.g., bats and balls) and facilities (e.g., trampoline, basketball ring). Unfortunately, evidence on these influences is limited.

A study of physical activity determinants in obese and non-obese children showed that irrespective of weight status, access to physical activity and exercise equipment in the home was positively associated with activity levels (Trost et al., 2001). A review by Davison and Lawson (2006) found no strong evidence of associations between the home environment and children’s physical activity and concluded that any association between home equipment and children’s physical activity is limited to white adolescents and to self-reported measures of physical activity.

A review of 54 studies of 3-12 year olds published between 1976 and 1999 found that for this age group time spent outdoors was a consistent correlate of physical activity (Sallis, Prochaska & Taylor, 2000). However, whether time spent outdoors is associated with yard size or other outdoor spaces such as public parks and playgrounds or play in the street is not known.

In qualitative research exploring parents’ perceptions of factors influencing where their child plays (Veitch et al., 2006) the yard at home was the place where children played most often. Fewer parents’ reported that their child usually played in public open spaces (e.g., parks and playgrounds). Parents’ who lived in a cul-de-sac, however, consistently reported that their child played in the cul-de-sac and that they were more likely to play in the street than in the yard at home. The main reasons for this was that the cul-de-sac was more appealing to the children due to social reasons as other neighbours and children all played together in the cul-de-sac.

Parents who lived in a cul-de-sac also commented that having parks close by was not that important as the children were happy to play in the street and the parents were happy with this as they were not required to take them to other places to play. Parents also considered the cul-de-sac a safe place for their child to play.

References

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