

25 May 2007 Inactive Kids Storing Up Illness for the Future

A new University of Leicester study funded by the British Heart Foundation reveals that the level of physical inactivity among children today has reached epidemic levels. Researchers from Leicester -Professor Kamlesh Khunti, Professor Melanie Davies and Dr Margaret Stone- have just published one of the largest studies of physical activity levels of inner city school children.

They surveyed over 3500 pupils from five inner city secondary schools in Leicester. They identified low levels of physical activity in both South Asian and white children. For example only half the children walked to school although south Asian children were less likely to walk to school compared to white children. Furthermore, half the pupils spent 4 hours or more a day watching television or videos or playing computer games. Family history of diabetes or heart disease in parents is a risk factor for development of diabetes or heart disease in their children. However, the researchers found that children of parents with a family history of diabetes or heart disease were just as likely to have sedentary behaviours as those without a family history.

Professor Khunti said: "People of South Asian origin comprise significant-sized minority ethnic populations in many countries worldwide. A consistent finding in South Asian migrant populations, wherever they are located, is a higher incidence and prevalence of premature coronary heart disease compared with the local population.

"Metabolic abnormalities precede the development of diabetes by some years and risk factors for cardiovascular disease in children often persist into adulthood. There is also evidence of increased risk of cardiovascular risk factors in children of South Asian origin compared to white children. The need to implement prevention strategies for childhood obesity is therefore a major target for the government and health care professionals.

"Inactive behaviour, such as watching television, may predict subsequent adult overweight and obesity in children and adolescent. However, there is a lack of data on physical activity levels of South Asian children despite them having a higher cardiovascular risk profile.

"This study shows that overall the physical activity levels in inner city school children are very low and parents, schools and community health providers need to address the results of these findings to reduce their future risks of developing diabetes and heart disease in children".