



media release

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Tel 64 3 479 8263 / 64 3 479 5016 / 64 3 479 5452 or Fax 479 5059

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Children from active homes more likely to be active teens

The key to raising active teenagers is giving them plenty of opportunities to play at home and be part of an active family when younger, new University of Otago research suggests.

The finding comes out of the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study at the University, which has followed 1000 Dunedin-born people since their birth in 1972/73. It is published in the March issue of the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

At ages seven and nine, home-based opportunities to climb trees and fences, play on swings, play in paddling pools, ride bikes and play ball games were recorded, as well as family involvement in social and recreational activities. Later, at ages 15 and 18, physical activity participation was also measured.

Lead author Dr Rose Richards says the research found that study members whose childhood family environment involved more social and recreation activities and opportunities to play at home were more likely to maintain that active lifestyle during adolescence.

“We already know that keeping kids and teens physically active is important for their health and development. Unfortunately, physical activity usually declines during adolescence, so it is exciting to find childhood factors that we can encourage to help protect against this,” Dr Richards says.

“Having opportunities for children to play outdoors in the home environment, and encouraging a family dynamic where regular participation in social and recreational activities is part of normal family life, gives kids a head start for staying active when they are older.”

Dr Richards is based in the Cancer Society Social and Behavioural Research Unit and the Dunedin Multidisciplinary health and Development Research Unit at the University.

For more information, contact:

Dr Rose Richards

Tel: 03 479 7209

Email: rose.richards@otago.ac.nz