Canadian kids need to move more
to boost their brain health

GRADE
D+
Overall Physical Activity

Canadian kids aren't active enough.

95% of 5- to 17-year-olds meet the physical activity recommendations with the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth (2018). However, 95% of 5- to 17-year-olds need the physical activity recommendations with the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for the Early Years (2019). 2013-13 and 2014-15 KOHE, Institute Canada.(3)

The Science Is In
KIDS + STEPS + SWEAT = HEALTHIER BRAINS

Kids need to drop the phones, turn off the screens, get off the couch and break a sweat. It’s time for them to get moving more — for the sake of their brains.

For decades we’ve known that physical activity improves heart health, helps maintain healthy body weights and builds strong bones and muscles in kids across a range of skills and abilities. (1,2,3) Now we are taking a closer look at what physical activity does for one of the most vital and complex organs: the brain.

The data around physical activity are alarming: on average, kids are still sitting too much and moving too little to reach their full potential.

Why does this matter? It’s all about the brain + body equation. There are important connections between the health of the body and the brain, connections that must be fostered in order for kids to reach their mental, emotional and intellectual potential. Kids’ bodies have to move to get the wheels in their brains turning. They need to be active, their brain health depends on it. A growing body of evidence indicates that physical activity in childhood is essential for a healthy brain and leads to improved:

- thinking and learning
- emotional regulation and self-control
- problem-solving ability
- memory
- brain plasticity — the growth of new brain tissue
- stress management
- ability to cope with anxiety and depressive symptoms
- self-esteem and self-worth
- attention and focus

Adding more physical activity to kids’ routines could be the missing part of the equation to support their success in the classroom, on the field, and with their friends.

Screen Time (49.3%)
Sleep Duration (75.3%)

(10.7% met none of the guidelines)

Figure. Venn diagram illustrating the proportion of 5- to 17-year-olds in Canada meeting various combinations of recommendations within the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Behaviour Guidelines for Children and Youth (source: Roberts et al., 2017).