

Study spotlights 'exercise-friendly' day-care centers [US] ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

Access to the outdoors and portable toys can boost just how much exercise youngsters get at a day-care center, researchers say.

"Childhood obesity is an epidemic that threatens the future health of our nation. We know that about 57 percent of all 3- to 5-year-olds in the United States attend child-care centers, so it's important to understand what factors will encourage them to be more active, and, hopefully, less likely to become obese," study co-author Dianne Ward said in a statement. Ward is director of the intervention and policy division in the nutrition department at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Public Health.

In their study, Ward's team evaluated the physical activity levels of children at 20 child-care centers in North Carolina.

They found that children did more moderate and vigorous physical activity if the child-care center: had more portable play equipment, such as balls, jump ropes, hula hoops and riding toys; offered more opportunities for indoor and outdoor active play; and provided physical activity training and education for staff and students.

Climbing structures, swings, balance beams and other stationary playground equipment were associated with less intense physical activity. However, these items are beneficial to other aspects of child development, such as motor and social skills, the researchers noted. Interestingly, children at day-care centers with more computer and television equipment had good physical activity scores, the study found.

"It's unlikely that TV and computers promoted active behavior, but it could be that centers that have the resources to buy media equipment may also spend more on equipment and activities that promote physical activity and provide supplemental training and education for staff," Ward said.

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