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## Boys benefit greatly from sustained participation in youth soccer

17 Aug 2005

Regular and long-term participation in soccer greatly improves the health profile of growing boys, according to new research published by the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM). The study, appearing in the October issue of *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*®, ACSM's official scientific journal, shows sharp contrasts between the greater benefits achieved through routine, extracurricular sports participation and those afforded most school children through physical education alone.

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Researchers recruited a large group of prepubertal Spanish boys for the study and followed them for more than three years. Those who regularly played soccer for at least three hours a week were separated from those who only engaged in regular in-school physical education of two, 45-minute sessions per week. Researchers collected several health and athletic ability measurements at the outset of the study period and again at the conclusion. These included anaerobic capacity, running speed, forces exerted during a vertical jump, aerobic maximal power (VO2max), and bone and lean mass.

Among the boys whose activity levels remained constant after three years, the soccer players showed more positive increases in anaerobic capacity (7 percent more), total lean body mass (6 percent more), and total bone mineral density (more than 33 percent more) than the control group. Conversely, those in the less active group had significantly increased their percentage of body fat by the end of the study period.

"Other studies have shown sports and activities, such as gymnastics, may enhance bone mass accumulation during growth," said lead researcher Jose A. L. Calbet, M.D., Ph.D., of the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria in Spain. "But these activities can require significant training time or specific facilities. Many children enjoy soccer and willingly participate in soccer outside of school if encouraged to do so. For this reason, soccer should be promoted as a low-cost, effective option to facilitate healthy growth.

The researchers point out that it is during the prepubertal growth spurt when bone tissue is

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more responsive to exercise. The study shows that the soccer group not only increased whole body bone mineral density, but also had higher regional measures in areas such as the lumbar spine (13 percent) and the femoral neck in the hip (10 percent). These increases correlated statistically to increases in other fitness factors such as anaerobic capacity and force generated during jumping.

"This kind of activity during this period in a child's life can have the greatest impact on lifelong health factors such as the prevention of osteoporosis," added German Vicente-Rodriguez, the study's author. "It's concerning that after this three-year study period, most of the children only engaged in the school physical education sessions. These restricted activities are insufficient and inadequate to achieve the full potential of bone development."

The American College of Sports Medicine is the largest sports medicine and exercise science organization in the world. More than 20,000 International, National, and Regional members are dedicated to advancing and integrating scientific research to provide educational and practical applications of exercise science and sports medicine.

NOTE: Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise® is the official journal of the American College of Sports Medicine, and is available from Lippincott Williams & Wilkins at 1-800-638-6423. For a complete copy of the research paper (Vol. 36, No. 10, pages 1789 to 1795) or to speak with a leading sports medicine expert on the topic, contact the Department of Communications and Public Information at 317-637-9200 ext. 127 or 117. Visit ACSM online at [American College of Sports Medicine](#).

The conclusions outlined in this news release are those of the researchers only, and should not be construed as an official statement of the American College of Sports Medicine.

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