

**For Immediate Release**  
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## **Can Recess Replace Ritalin? Preliminary Findings from a Classroom-based Physical Activity Program**

Maybe recess can at times substitute for Ritalin, and related medications used to treat attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Dr. David Katz, the Director of Yale University's Prevention Research Center, and founder of the ABC for Fitness (<http://davidkatzmd.com/abcforfitness.aspx>) program has long harangued diverse audiences - up to and including the nation's governors! - that rambunctiousness in children should be treated with something more like recess, and less like Ritalin. Katz' rant on this topic has been inspired by the steady decrease in school-based physical activity and the steady increase in the rate of ADHD over recent years.

Now, there are preliminary data to suggest that exercise actually does have the potential to substitute for Ritalin and related medications at times. In a controlled evaluation of Katz' ABC for Fitness program in the 13 elementary schools of the Independence, Missouri school district, there was a 33% reduction in the number of children receiving medication for ADHD in the intervention schools, as compared to only a 7% reduction over the same period in the control schools. Given the relatively small sample size, the difference is of borderline statistical significance.

"This finding is certainly preliminary, and requires further testing before we trust it completely," said Dr. Katz. "But the trend is clear enough, and conforms entirely to intuition, and our hypothesis that in some cases, what could be the normal rambunctiousness of childhood morphs into pathology because of the very abnormal conditions to which we subject kids these days. It is, quite simply, normal for kids to run around. With pressure to focus on standardized tests related in part to the 'No Child Left Behind' legislation, we have been leaving all of the children ON their behinds! In fact, we take naturally kinetic kids, bolt them to chairs all day long- then wonder why we wind up with adults we can't get off couches with crowbars!"

The ABC for Fitness program was inspired by the native 'fidgetiness' of Katz' son, Gabriel, who at the age of 5 couldn't sit still while attending a talk given by his father. In desperation, Katz invited his son to run laps around the auditorium in which he was speaking, only to see more and more young children get up and follow him. ABC for Fitness was born.

"My son, now 9, is perfectly healthy," says Katz. "But if you are cooped up with him for any length of time, Lord knows you need to medicate either him, or yourself! He is just a restless guy, and needs to run around. There are a lot of kids like that."

Beginning with that simple idea, ABC for Fitness was developed by Katz and colleagues, including experts in physical education and teaching. The program offers a detailed manual on providing brief bouts of physical activity throughout the day, right in the classroom. The program

is designed to replace 'down time' in the classroom, that would be squandered on discipline, rather than reduce teaching time. In fact, the program materials include details on how to teach during the activity bursts, and thus there is the potential for a net increase in total daily teaching time. The program is designed to improve physical fitness, enhance academic performance, reduce behavioral disruptions in the classroom, and reduce the rate at which medication is prescribed for ADHD. Data soon to be published suggest all of these benefits are being realized.

"We are just thrilled to be implementing this program in our schools..." said Dr. Jim Hinson, Superintendent of the Independence School District. Building activity bursts into our curriculum has proven successful on many levels. In addition to decreasing students' need for medication, ABC for Fitness has improved students' concentration and decreased discipline levels in the classroom. It has affected the health and wellness of students, and that has created a mindset of wellness for staff and administrators as well."

"We couldn't ask for a better partner than the Independence School District" Katz noted. "Working with Jim Hinson and his staff is just a pleasure. We're convinced that by working together, we can prove there are ways to promote the health and physical well-being of children in school, while fully respecting that the primary mission of schools is reading, writing, and 'rithmetic. If the school day is a round hole, and wellness programs are a square peg, we just need to get out our drills and chisels, and go to work. That's just what Jim (Hinson) and his staff did, right along with us."

The study of both the ABC for Fitness program, and the Nutrition Detectives ([www.nutritiondetectives.com](http://www.nutritiondetectives.com)) program, was funded by a grant from the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City, based in Missouri, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The ABC for Fitness program materials are freely available to all at: <http://davidkatzmd.com/abcforfitness.aspx>

### **About Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center**

The Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center (PRC) was established in 1998 through funding from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). One of 33 such centers nationwide representing academic/community partnerships, the Yale-Griffin PRC is engaged in interdisciplinary applied prevention research in collaboration with community partners, federal, state, and local health and education agencies, and other universities. The goal the PRC is to develop innovative approaches to health promotion and disease prevention that will directly benefit the public's health, first locally, and then nationally. For more information, please visit [www.yalegriffinprc.org](http://www.yalegriffinprc.org).

### **About the Independence School District:**

The Independence School District of Independence Missouri (ISD) is a leader in offering innovative and sophisticated programs to its students. ISD is committed to a school based delivery approach to comprehensive education and family services to approximately 14,000 students. This strategy identifies services that can be braided and delivered through schools to provide quality educational experiences to students and families. True to this model, ISD has woven both nutrition and fitness education throughout the school day to educate students, their families, and the larger community as a whole.

### **About Dr. Katz:**

**David L. Katz MD, MPH, FACPM, FACP** is an internationally recognized authority on nutrition, weight management, and the prevention of chronic disease. He is a board certified specialist in

both Internal Medicine, and Preventive Medicine/Public Health, and Associate Professor (adjunct) in Public Health Practice at the Yale University School of Medicine. Katz is the Director and founder of Yale University's *Prevention Research Center*, Director and founder of the *Integrative Medicine Center* at Griffin Hospital in Derby, CT, and founder and president of the non-profit *Turn the Tide Foundation*. Katz has published over 100 scientific papers and chapters, and 11 books to date; he has acquired and managed some \$25 million in research funds. He is a medical journalist, having formerly served as a medical contributor to ABC News with routine appearances on *Good Morning America*. He is currently the nutrition columnist for O, the Oprah Magazine; a health columnist for the New York Times Syndicate; and an editorial advisor and blogger for Prevention Magazine. Katz has twice been recognized by the Consumers Research Council of America as one of America's top physicians in Preventive Medicine. He is the principal inventor of the Overall Nutritional Quality Index (ONQI) algorithm.

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