

School Gardens Grow Kids' Physical Activity Levels

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To get schoolchildren moving, uproot them from classrooms into school gardens, concludes a two-year Cornell study of 12 elementary schools in five New York regions.

By experiment's end, kids at schools with gardens were moderately physically active at school for 10 more minutes a week than before their schools

had gardens. That was an increase of four times what peers experienced at gardenless schools. What's more, children who gardened at school were substantially less sedentary at home and elsewhere than their counterparts.

With nearly one in three American children overweight or obese, school gardens could be a simple, low-cost way to get kids more active, said environmental psychologist Nancy Wells, associate professor of design and environmental analysis in Cornell's College of Human Ecology.

She presented the findings March 11 at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Active Living Research Conference in San Diego.

"This is the first true experiment to measure the effects of school gardens on children's physical activity, and we found a significant increase," Wells said. "It is notable that in our intervention, kids were only spending an hour or two per week in the gardens, yet there was a significant difference in physical activity. The findings suggest that if schools embraced gardens further and integrated them into lesson plans, there might be an even greater effect."

A new study reports that children in schools with vegetable gardens got 10 minutes more of exercise than before their schools had gardens.

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