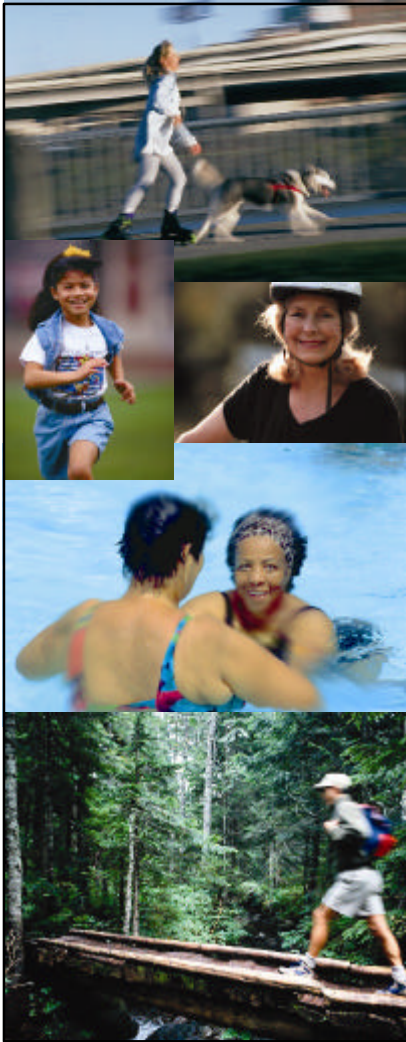


Physical activity and the environment



The environment and immediate surroundings have a major influence on whether or not people will engage in physical activity and adopt it as part of their regular behavior. Unfortunately, throughout urban areas in the Americas, most neighborhoods lack supportive environments for recreation and physical activity. This represents a major constraint for being active on a regular basis. The lack of sidewalks, parks, and places to exercise, as well as limited access to recreational areas, heavy vehicular traffic, air pollution and other safety concerns are some of the environmental limitations.

Public health organizations must look beyond individual behavior and lifestyle modification strategies, and also address far-reaching environmental, social, and policy changes to increase physical activity in the population. Community leaders should address the safety, accessibility, and affordability of environments that promote physical activity for all. If people are to adopt and maintain healthy behaviors, they must be supported by adequate policies that provides a safe environment in which to live and be active.

Health professionals can also make an important contribution to the health of their patients by promoting active living. In fact, due to their high credibility on health matters, most health practitioners can make a difference by incorporating the recommendations for physical activity (see Fact Sheet #4) into their medical therapeutic and preventive arsenal.

Let's Move for Health!

Physical Activity Fact Sheet Series 5 of 5
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PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
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Celebrating 100 years of health and the World Health Day 2002 dedicated to Physical Activity!