The weather is fine and we are all outside enjoying the fresh air and moving around more than we did during the winter months. At least that is true for many of us. For others, physical activity is a challenge perhaps physically and mentally.

A qualitative study by Palmer-Keenan examined the physical activity-related attitudes of inactive teens from low-income, urban areas prior to developing a campaign to increase their activity. Five focus groups were held after screening teens to assure inactivity. Not surprisingly, the teens felt the activity had to be fun, and technology-related activities were mentioned, such as Wii Fit and Just Dance. Teens also mentioned using DVDs and YouTube, although sharing time with friends or family also increased the idea of fun. Dancing anywhere was fun, but sports were associated with barriers such as access and cost. While organized sports were not a favorite, individual or group challenges brought “fun” into the activity. However, physical comfort was important as was the location. School-based activities were fine as long as they were not in gym class. Finally, the teens felt that “cool” promoters of any campaign were important. Interestingly, in another study, adolescents included physical activity as part of defining “being healthy.”

Unfortunately, measuring physical activity as an outcome can be burdensome for the program participants as well as the educators and researchers. Although there are questionnaires that can be used, the environment and cultural norms need to be acknowledged. Both the process and outcome of a study to develop the physical activity, sedentary behavior, and sleep habits of adolescents in Korea provide important results. For this group, DVD and TV viewing were not pertinent, but smartphone use was important. Within their literature review of 35 questionnaires identified, only 2 others covered all the components these researchers identified: physical activity, sedentary behavior, and sleep habits. The 19-question survey presents moderate reliability and promise as an educational or research tool for the future.

It is hard to discuss the physical activity of adolescents without considering nutritional supplements. One study of high schoolers in Slovenia reported that dietary supplements were used by the majority of those who considered themselves athletes as well as non-athletes. While males described benefits to muscle development and function, females reported enhanced immune systems. Surprisingly to me, 30% received advice on dietary supplements from parents or relatives. Authors suggested that educational programs including information on dietary supplements were needed for both the students and parents. A US study of collegiate athletes reported a need for education as well, primarily related to quality concerns related to safety and legality issues. About 44% of the participants used 1 or more supplements. The report by Brown and Tenison provides details of dual-purpose collegiate athlete nutrition advising program and educational curricula that provides an interesting framework for those working with collegiate athletes.

I know my own physical activity routine gets disrupted often. Unfortunately, it is probably a rare week that I get 150 minutes of moderate physical activity in a week as recommended, but I do strength training most days. I try to sit less and move more. Like the teens, I like it to be fun and in my comfort zone, but have never thought about using a dietary supplement for muscle function or immunity. Physical activity is an area that most nutrition educators agree is important, but how much are we really doing about this issue? Are we teaching strategies in our college courses for future dietitians and educators? Including physical activity in our programs and interventions? Could we “move more” in these areas?

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