

active bodies,
healthy minds

December 2010





contents

"...each year one in five young Australians are likely to suffer from a mental health problem."

Opening Message..... The Hon Julia Gillard MP, Prime Minister of Australia
 Swim, Cycle, Run...Be Happy..... Rick Wilson, Sanitarium Health & Wellbeing
 Foreword..... Dr Christine Bennett, Bupa Australia
 A Growing Problem..... Anja Sussmann, Sanitarium Nutrition Service (SNS)
 Case Study 1..... Nelle Forster
 A Roadmap for Life..... Professor Frank Oberklaid, The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne
 Exercise Feeds The Mind..... Anja Sussmann, SNS
 Case Study 2..... Joseph Walsh
 Active Bodies = Happy Kids..... Newspoll findings
 The Reasons to TRY..... Research findings
 Supporting the Cause..... Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon Ambassadors
 The 2011 Series..... Schedule of events

Cover photograph: Tony Phillips.
 2010 event photographs by Andy Hatton (Melbourne and Geelong), Ron Kirkman (Perth), Michael Oates (Adelaide), Dave Gosling (Sydney and Canberra) and Tony Phillips (Brisbane).

"A healthy body is one key stepping stone to a healthy mind. The WHO (World Health Organisation) also says that there is "no health without mental health". Two sides of the same coin. We also know exercise and a healthy diet can improve wellbeing and even be good for the brain and its development!"

Professor Patrick McGorry
 - Executive Director of Orygen Youth Health & current Australian of the Year

creating healthy habits

By the Hon Julia Gillard MP, Prime Minister of Australia



The Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon inspires children to get moving in a friendly and supportive environment where the emphasis is on enjoying the experience as part of an active lifestyle rather than competition. Kids of all abilities cross the finish line a champion and everyone who participates takes home a medal.

“...for young people aged 15-24 years, mental disorders are the single greatest cause of years of healthy life lost.”

Regular physical activity is important for everyone, but especially for children. An active lifestyle encourages healthy growth and development during children’s important growing years. It helps build strong bones and muscles, develops coordination and improves balance and flexibility.

Regular activity, through play, games and exercise, also helps to maintain healthy weight and to improve self-esteem, confidence and allows children to gain a sense of achievement while providing a sense of belonging. Organised physical activity challenges children to work in a group and encourages them to think of others.

Children are naturally active. They love to play, to be outdoors and to have fun. Encouraging children to be active from a young age is important. Playing active games with friends, heading outside for active family outings or joining an activity like the Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon will all help to create healthy habits that will benefit children throughout the rest of their lives.

“By introducing children to sport at a young age we can establish a life-long enjoyment of physical activity and help fight obesity. Programs like the Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon are great at encouraging a healthy lifestyle and provide kids with a pathway into organised sport. Good luck to all those kids competing.”

Senator the Hon Mark Arbib
– Minister for Sport, Parliament of Australia

swim, cycle, run...be happy

By Rick Wilson, General Manager Sales & Marketing, Sanitarium Health & Wellbeing



It is often difficult for us, as adults, to truly appreciate what it means to be a kid today.

I try to picture myself in the same age bracket as our Weet-Bix Kids TRYathletes – seven, eight, nine...through to 15 years of age. How imposing the world looks compared to my childhood, which seems to get more idyllic with each passing year.

In our era we didn't have to contend with such a rapidly growing population putting pressure on space, resources and transport; nor modern-day communications connecting us with everything the world has to offer from our workplace, home, café or school.

Everything seems faster, more pressured, increasingly disposable.

That's why it isn't surprising to see the heart-breaking figures about the incidence of mental health problems in our children, rates that rise as we grow older.

We commissioned this report – *Active Bodies, Healthy Minds* – because we've seen firsthand the positive impact our event has had on Aussie youngsters. In addition, research conducted pre and post last summer's series struck a chord with us.



Heading into its 13th year, the Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon in partnership with MBF engages children aged between seven and 15 and features swimming, cycling and running legs of varying distance depending on age.

Parents were saying their children were more motivated to exercise after registering to take part and they were certain those good exercise habits would continue into the future. They were also delighted with the emphasis on all participants being made to feel like a winner.

Gratifyingly, almost half said the experience had boosted their children's confidence and self-esteem.

That's when we decided to conduct some more research, draw together relevant studies and approach leading healthcare professionals to examine the correlation between physical exercise and mental wellbeing among young Australians.

The results have reinforced our commitment to the Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon in partnership with MBF.

This event is simply a delight to run and the true reward is in seeing determined faces become excited and proud when the kids cross that finish line. If we can motivate and encourage children and their families to become more active and to eat more healthfully along the way, that's a real bonus. And it could also pay unexpected dividends in the future with regards to healthy bodies contributing to healthy minds.

We would like to thank all the dedicated health professionals who have provided input into this report.

Children can be very thankful that Dr Christine Bennett is such a spirited and influential advocate for their wellbeing and she, along with luminaries like Professor Frank Oberklaid and Professor Patrick McGorry, are true crusaders for more understanding of – and greater support for – children's health issues.

Get behind them. And get in behind our kids, so their childhood is every bit as idyllic, pressure-free and rewarding as we remember.

your health starts with you

A foreword by Dr Christine Bennett

Dr Christine Bennett is the Chief Medical Officer of Bupa Australia, which operates the brands MBF, HBA and Mutual Community, and has more than 25 years of health industry experience in clinical care, strategic planning and senior management. She has held chief executive positions in public, private and social enterprises, including tenures as CEO of Research Australia and Chief Executive at Westmead, Australia's largest teaching hospital. She also has experience as a commercial consultant and advisor in health and biotech industries as a Partner of Health and Life Sciences at KPMG Australia. Dr Bennett is currently also Chairman of Research Australia and non-executive director of HeartWare, a publicly listed medical device company.



Our physical and emotional wellbeing are inextricably linked, never more so than in childhood.

As a paediatrician I have often marvelled at the resilience of children, even when they are sore or sick, making every effort to play and use their imagination.

In this report – *Active Bodies, Healthy Minds* – experts in child health, mental health and social policy share their views, experience and evidence of the importance of physical wellbeing to mental and emotional wellbeing.

Throughout life, maintaining regular physical exercise is of proven benefit to our health and indeed mental health.

With 60% of Australian adults and one in four children overweight or obese; with diabetes on the rise and children now suffering from Type 2 (weight related) diabetes, unheard of only a decade ago; and a change in social habits where children are drawn to an online, onscreen lifestyle; now more than ever we need to encourage and support our children in finding a sport or physical activity that they enjoy.

Whether it is team sports or individual pursuits such as running, swimming and cycling, children today need these opportunities as much as a good education and development of other skills. A child's sport or favourite form

of exercise can also form part of the 'scaffolding' and social network that will be a part of their life always.

MBF has been a proud supporter over many years as the Series Partner of the Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon. Importantly, we believe this exciting event provides a trigger for children, and indeed their families, to learn new skills and to enjoy these activities together. It is not just about a one day event, but about embedding these activities into their lives.

As a mother, I was delighted that my daughter Hannah learned to ride a bike when she was nine, with the goal of participating in the Kids TRYathlon that year. The setting and realising of a goal that isn't necessarily about competing and winning, but about striving for your own sense of achievement, builds self-esteem and confidence.

As Chief Medical Officer of Bupa Australia – which operates the brands MBF, HBA and Mutual Community – I like to promote the message that "your health starts with you". We need to get back to the basics: the importance of healthy eating, physical exercise and getting the right amount of quality sleep – these are the key dimensions of good health.

Australians generally consider themselves a sporting nation, with pride and vigour.

Let's support our children to be active participants as part of this national identity.

I would encourage all parents and families to make regular sport and physical exercise that they like, a part of their family's fun and activity together to help our future generations of Australians to live longer, healthier, happier lives.

The 2011 Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon features nine events around the country from January to May, starting in Canberra before travelling to the Central Coast, Sydney, Adelaide, Perth, Geelong, St Kilda, Brisbane and Townsville.

a growing problem

Mental Health Benefits of Physical Activity



Compiled by Anja Sussmann, a member of the Sanitarium Nutrition Service (SNS) – a team of qualified nutritionists and dietitians working together to inspire and resource our community to enjoy nourishing foods and the benefits of a healthier lifestyle.

“...the only long-term study in young teens does associate reduced physical activity with increased symptoms of depression.”

Each year approximately one in five young Australians are likely to suffer from a mental health problem¹.

Among children aged four to 12 years the prevalence of mental health problems is, at most, 14%². This rises to 19% among adolescents aged 13-17 years² and increases, dramatically, to 27% among young adults aged 18-24³ – the highest prevalence of mental disorder among any age group.

The Victorian Burden of Disease Study has reinforced the seriousness of this problem, demonstrating that for young people aged 15-24 years, mental disorders are the single greatest cause of years of healthy life lost⁴.

This plight underlines the importance to understand the cause and determine preventative measures to minimise the prevalence of mental health problems as much as possible.

While many existing studies describe the benefits of regular physical activity on adult mental health⁵, fewer studies make the same link in younger people, especially those focusing on the long-term effects of physical activity. There also seems to be a lack of focus on how often children participate in physical activity and how this may impact on mental health, as well as differences between boys and girls.



Nevertheless, there is a vast body of scientific research carried out over short periods of time that makes an association between physical activity and better mental health in children and adolescents.

The only long-term study in young teens does associate reduced physical activity with increased symptoms of depression⁶. Other research found fewer emotional symptoms and peer problems in male teens aged 18-19 years who have been involved in weekly physical activity at age 15-16 years⁵.

These findings are consistent with results gained from other studies. For example, regular exercise has been linked with less inhibition in social behaviour⁷, while less frequent or no exercise has been linked to higher scores of loneliness, shyness and hopelessness in both boys and girls⁸.

Other studies also support the beneficial effects of physical activity. Those who are physically fit have an enhanced ability to handle stress. Other benefits include improved depression scores, a reduced need for stimulant medication in children with ADHD, greater self-esteem, improved academic achievement and a reduced incidence of juvenile crime. Also, persistence, self-reliance, commitment and motivation may be promoted and help with character development⁹.

According to the 1998 Child and Adolescent Component of the National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, the most frequently identified mental health problems were somatic complaints (that is, chronic physical complaints without a known cause), delinquent behaviour, attention problems and aggressive behaviour

(Sawyer et al. 2000).

It needs to be mentioned that much of the current data available confirms an association between physical activity and the benefits listed above, but does not necessarily show a causal link. For instance, improved self-esteem in children who participate in physical activity could indicate that fewer children with lower self-esteem participate in physical activity. There could also be an indirect association by way of improved body mass index (BMI) scores in children who participate in regular physical exercise, which in turn could lead to improved self-esteem.

While further studies are needed in order to arrive at more definitive conclusions, a huge number of existing studies do draw a significant association between regular physical activity and positive health and mental health aspects. This suggests that considerable benefits are to be gained from creating more opportunities for our children and adolescents to be involved in regular physical activity.

References

1. Australian Institute of Health & Welfare: AIHW, 2003.
2. Sawyer, M.G., Arney, F.M., Baghurst, P.A., Clark, J.J., Graetz, B.W., & Kosky, R.J., et al (2000). The Mental Health of Young People in the Australia. Mental Health and Special Programs Branch, Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged and Care.
3. W. McLennan (1997). Mental Health and Wellbeing: Profile of Adults, Australia
4. The Australian Psychological Society Ltd. http://www.psychology.org.au/publications/inpsych/youth_mental_health/ accessed 22 October 2010
5. Sagatun, A. et al (2007). The association between weekly hours of physical activity and mental health: A three-year follow-up study of 15-16-year-old students in the city of Oslo, Norway. BMC Public Health, 7: 155.
6. Mott, R.W. et al (2004). Naturally occurring changes in physical activity are inversely related to depressive symptoms during early adolescence. Psychosom Med, 66: 336-342.
7. Kirkcaldy, B.D. et al (1994). The relationship between physical activity and self-image and problem behaviour among adolescents. Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol, 37: 544-550.
8. Page, R.M., Tucker, L.A. Psychological discomfort and exercise frequency: an epidemiological study of adolescents. Adolescence, 29: 183-191.
9. Nieman P, MD. Psychosocial aspects of physical activity. Paediatr Child Health 2002; 7: 309-312

case study 1:

Nelle Forster, Jindabyne, NSW

Completing the 2010 Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon gave Nelle Forster a wonderful sense of pride and achievement and she relished the opportunity to socialise and have fun with her peers. For shy and reserved Nelle, finishing the TRYathlon provided a welcome confidence-boost and helped sustain her love of sport.



“From what I’ve gleaned from this report, my roadmap for assisting my son will start with unconditional love, a healthy diet and time together being active – a mix of organised sport and the classic Aussie backyard battles that fuel a lust for life.”

Brett Lee, Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon National Ambassador and the 4th highest Australian test wicket taker of all time

Nelle Forster (pictured, far left), aged 11, is from the small ski town of Jindabyne at the base of the Snowy Mountains in New South Wales.

Nelle is an avid cross-country skier and is generally active, spending much of her free time riding her bike and swimming with her local swim squad. Despite her love for physical activity and her involvement in team sports, however, Nelle is quite shy and tends to stand back from the crowd whenever she can.

In February 2010, Nelle took part in the Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon in Canberra for the first time, following encouragement from one of her close friends who had participated before. Nelle’s mother, Janet Forster, was delighted to see how much pleasure her daughter took from her experience on the day and the positive impact it had on her confidence and sense of achievement.

“Nelle hadn’t taken part in the Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon before, and despite already being very physically active, she was a bit nervous that she wouldn’t be able to do it.

“Her sense of triumph on finishing the course was obvious – she felt good about herself and proud of her accomplishment. Although I never doubted that she’d do really well, for Nelle it was a new achievement and therefore very rewarding.

“Having the opportunity to participate in a non-competitive event with an emphasis on giving it a go and having fun is not something that occurs very often, and is a fantastic environment for kids.

“The general atmosphere of support and encouragement was a major factor in Nelle’s enjoyment of the day and her eagerness to take part in the 2011 series. It was incredibly warming to see all the participants and their parents get behind each other on the day.”

Janet Forster said the physical aspect of the Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon wasn’t the only reason Nelle had a ball.

“The opportunity to socialise and generally have some fun with the other kids was just as rewarding – she’s even rallied a few friends to take part with her this summer!

“As her mother, it’s fantastic to see the impact the event has had on Nelle, not just her sense of pride and fulfilment at completing the course, but the enjoyment she had with all the other kids on the day and the obvious positive effect on her self-confidence.

“By no means is Nelle the kind of girl that has to win at everything, but it’s important for her to know that she has done her best. The Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon affords her the opportunity to get involved, try her hardest and enjoy that sense of achievement with her peers.

“Nelle had such a fantastic time at the 2010 event she wants us to drive down to Melbourne next year so she can compete there as well! I’m not sure that we’ll make it all the way to Victoria, but we will certainly be back in Canberra in 2011.”

a roadmap for life

By Professor Frank Oberklaid

Professor Frank Oberklaid is the Founding Director of the Centre for Community Child Health at The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne. An internationally recognised researcher, author, lecturer and consultant, he has edited two books, numerous book chapters, and over 150 scientific papers on various aspects of paediatrics and is on the editorial boards of several international journals. He has received a number of prestigious awards for his work, including a Medal in the Order of Australia in 1998, a Centenary Medal from the Commonwealth of Australia in 2003, the John Sands Medal from the Royal Australasian College of Physicians in 2003 and the Howard Williams Medal from the Royal Australasian College of Physicians in 2009.



"...self-esteem has reliably been shown to predispose to, or buffer against, the development of numerous psychiatric disorders, including eating disorders."



It is now commonly held that good health is influenced by the interplay between biological, psychological and social factors; Engel called this the biopsychosocial model¹. Nowhere is this model more applicable than to obesity, which has emerged in recent years as a major public health problem worldwide.

While researchers continue to search for genetic and biological predispositions to obesity, it is clear that the major contributing factor has been the change in lifestyle over the past several decades – the social issues. Dietary habits have changed, with the consumption of far higher amounts of energy-dense food, and we are a much less active society than previous generations. Children are engaged far more in sedentary and passive pursuits such as watching television or playing computer games, and spending less time doing physical activity.

Interventions designed to prevent overweight and obesity in children, and to successfully treat these conditions once they are established, are complex and require action on multiple levels. Increased activity levels are always a component of every intervention plan.

While our present state of knowledge means that we are not yet able to do much about any biological contributions to obesity, we can begin to address the other two components of the biopsychosocial model – psychological and social factors that play a part. In this context, programs designed to increase children's activity levels are likely to benefit them both physically and psychologically.

In addition to being an important part of any obesity prevention or treatment program, there is an emerging literature about the benefits to self-esteem and mental health as well. If at the same time as encouraging regular physical exercise we can encourage healthy eating habits, then we are likely to establish behavioural patterns that potentially have a long term positive influence on improving children's health and wellbeing.

According to the 1998 Child and Adolescent Component of the National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, there was a strong association found between mental health problems and certain demographic factors, with high rates of mental health problems among children and adolescents living in low-income, step/blended and one-parent families

(Sawyer et al. 2000).

Reference

1. Engel, G (1977); The need for a new medical model; a challenge for biomedicine. Science, 196; 129-136.

exercise feeds the mind

The Effect of Physical Activity on Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing



Compiled by Anja Sussmann, BSc (Human Physiology, Psychology, Genetics), Master in Nutrition and Dietetics, Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD), Accredited Nutritionist (AN).

"...less frequent or no exercise has been linked to higher scores of loneliness, shyness and hopelessness in both boys and girls."

Key Studies

There are many reasons to be active and to encourage your kids to participate in physical activities.

Adolescence is a critical time during development when social, emotional, and physical factors tend to influence perceptions of the physical self¹.

It is well established that physical activity has many health benefits, from improving muscle and bone strength to cardiovascular health, to name just a few examples.

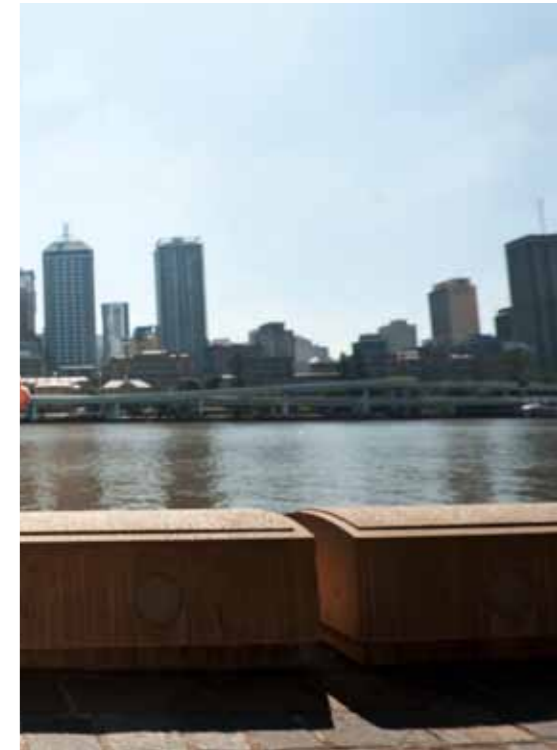
The Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon holds the world record as the largest triathlon series for children, officially sanctioned by the world governing body, the International Triathlon Union. Almost 30,000 Aussie and Kiwi kids took part in the 2010 series.

Apart from physical benefits, exercise has also been shown to have numerous positive effects on mental, social and academic performance in children and adolescents^{2,3}. Not only may exercise improve or maintain fitness and body shape and weight, and thus be beneficial for self-esteem and self-image⁴, it has also been shown to improve self-esteem independent of weight loss.

Furthermore, physical exercise enhances emotional wellbeing in children⁵, and can promote motivation and teach life skills that are helpful even beyond sport⁶.

Research also indicates that good self-esteem is a predictor of physical health⁷ and it is also a well-accepted measure of psychosocial health in youth⁸.

Moreover, self-esteem has reliably been shown to predispose to, or buffer against, the development of numerous psychiatric disorders, including eating disorders⁹. Thus, physical exercise can directly as well as indirectly, by promoting a healthy self-esteem, help improve a child's resilience against physical and mental conditions.



"The setting and realising of a goal that isn't necessarily about competing and winning, but about striving for your own sense of achievement, builds self-esteem and confidence."

Dr Christine Bennett,
Chief Medical Officer, MBF

References

1. Harter, S. (1999). The construction of the self: A developmental perspective. New York, NY: Guilford.
2. Article: ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT HIGHER AMONG MOST ACTIVE KIDS - Vigorous Physical Activity Linked to Better Grades. The American College of Sports Medicine. August 3, 2006. http://www.acsm.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home_Page&template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=5446 [accessed 20/9/2010]
3. Gary S. Goldfield, PhD et al. Effects of Modifying Physical Activity and Sedentary Behavior on Psychosocial Adjustment in Overweight/Obese Children. Journal of Pediatric Psychology. 2007; 32(7):783-793. © 2007 Oxford University Press
4. Kirkcaldy BD, Shephard RJ, Siefen RG. The relationship between physical activity and self-image and problem behaviour among adolescents. International Center for the Study of Occupational and Mental Health, Haydnstrasse 61, 40593 Duesseldorf, Germany. Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol. 2002 Nov;37(11):544-50. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12395145>
5. Fox KR. The influence of physical activity on mental well-being. Department of Exercise and Health Sciences, University of Bristol, UK. Public Health Nutr. 1999 Sep;2(3A):411-8. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10610081>
6. The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (USA). <http://appliedsportpsych.org/resource-center/parents> [accessed 20/9/2010]
7. Rhee H, Holditch-Davis D, Miles MS. Patterns of physical symptoms and relationships with psychosocial factors in adolescents. Psychosomatic Medicine 2005; 67:1006-1012
8. Rotenberg KJ, McDougall P, Boulton MJ, Vaillancourt T, Fox C, Hymel S. Cross-sectional and longitudinal relations among peer-reported trustworthiness, social relationships, and psychological adjustment in children and early adolescents from the United Kingdom and Canada. Journal of Experimental Child Psychology 2004; 88:46-67
9. Fairburn CG, Welch SL, Doll HA, Davies BA, O'Connor ME. Risk factors for bulimia nervosa. A community-based case-control study. Archives of General Psychiatry (1997) 54:509-517.

case study 2:

Joseph Walsh, Sydney, NSW

Since participating in the 2010 Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon in Sydney, Joseph Walsh has been determined to do his very best in everything he sets out to achieve; in sport, in the classroom, and in his relationships with friends, family and teachers. As a result, Joseph is accomplishing things he never would have thought possible...and his self-confidence has blossomed.



Joseph Walsh, now 10, took part in his first Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon in Sydney earlier this year at the tender age of nine. Joseph was already a keen swimmer, training up to twice a week, but as his father Michael Walsh explains, Joseph's experience in the TRYathlon inspired a new found dedication to the sport, which in turn had an enormously positive impact on his demeanour, his performance at school and on his overall self-esteem.

"Joseph had always been a reasonably active kid. He was into his swimming and rugby, but I suppose he never really took them particularly seriously. That all changed after taking part in the Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon.

"A child's sport or favourite form of exercise can also form part of the 'scaffolding' and social network that will be a part of their life always."

Dr Christine Bennett

"The atmosphere at Sydney Olympic Park was absolutely inspiring – all the kids were clearly excited and revved up – and the vibe was just really positive and energy-driven. It's rare to have a sporting environment that feels both genuinely supportive and fun, but also where participants clearly want to do their best.

"Joseph's experience in the TRYathlon was a huge confidence booster and motivated him to start taking his sport seriously and do his best at everything he set out to achieve. He really threw himself into his swimming especially, increasing his training to three or four days a week and attending carnivals most weekends. He is now ready for try-outs for the State Championships which is extremely exciting.

"It isn't just about the swimming though. His attitude to sport has a direct link to his overall behaviour and outlook. His academic performance at school has improved, he's happier and his self-confidence has increased.

Megan Glacken of Winston Hills became the 100,000th Aussie kid to register for the Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon when she signed up for the 2011 event in Sydney. The 100,000th across the line will feature in 2011's opening event in Canberra.

"I wouldn't say Joseph wasn't a confident kid prior to the TRYathlon, but he definitely saw himself as average, as nothing special. Being in an environment where your peers are pushing themselves to do their very best makes you push yourself even harder too. Even though the event is non-competitive, each and every child there was trying their absolute hardest, and Joseph took that energy and attitude and carried it forward both in his sporting aspirations and in other aspects of his life.

"There is no doubt the Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon triggered an enthusiasm in Joseph to succeed. He has greater self-esteem and really believes in his own capabilities. As his dad, I think that's fantastic!"

active bodies = happy kids

Australian Parents Back Exercise To Improve Kids' Self-Esteem



"...considerable benefits are to be gained from creating more opportunities for more children and adolescents to be involved in regular physical activity."

"...programs designed to increase children's activity levels are likely to benefit them both physically and psychologically."

Professor Frank Oberklaid,
Founding Director of the Centre
for Community Child Health

An overwhelming number of Australian parents believe their kids' confidence and self-esteem is boosted by physical exercise, but more than one in four says their child doesn't partake in regular exercise.

A nationwide Newspoll telephone survey of more than 440 parents conducted in October found that 94% believe physical activity has a positive impact on their child's self-esteem. Some 70% say it has a strong impact, while a further 24% believe it has a moderate impact.

Yet, despite such a ringing endorsement, one in ten respondents reveals their child rarely or never exercises and another 17% say their offspring get active only occasionally (a total of 27%).

Children of parents who aren't married are less likely to undertake physical activity regularly (61%) than those of parents who are married (75%) and children in lower socio-economic households are also less likely to exercise regularly – 67% of blue-collar workers' progeny compared to 77% of children with white-collar working parents.

In households where the annual income is \$80,000 or more, the participation in regular physical activity rose to 80% compared to 63% of children in lower income households.

Newspoll - key point summary

- More than a quarter (27%) of parents of children aged seven to 15 years old say their child does not participate in physical activity regularly where they are pursuing a particular goal, such as training to complete a fun run, being physically active to try and lose weight or playing in a team sport.
- Parents that are white collar, have a higher level of education and a higher household income are more likely to say their child regularly participates in physical activity where the child is pursuing a goal. This may be, in part, attributed to the cost associated with sport for children.
- A large majority of parents (94%) believe this type of physical activity has a positive impact on their child's overall self-esteem and mental wellbeing. 70% say it has a strong positive impact and a further 24% say it has a moderate positive impact.
- An extremely small proportion (4%) says physical exercise has no impact on their child's self-esteem and mental wellbeing while 1% believes it has a negative impact on their child.



Online registrations are open at www.weet-bix.com.au (closing two weeks before each event) and the website also features training and nutrition tips to help participants prepare properly.

the reasons to TRY...

A summary of the 2010 research with parents of TRYathletes



During the 2010 Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon series Sanitarium conducted research to track participant responses, behaviours and attitudes to the event.

The goal was to measure how the Weet-Bix event team was performing in relation to its three core objectives – motivating and enabling kids and their families to enjoy regular physical activity, promoting health and nutrition to improve lifestyle and enhancing the atmosphere and experience of the series itself.

This research was conducted nationally as a two part questionnaire at a.) time of registration (595 respondents) and b.) within a week of participating in the event (423 respondents).

Event Summary

The event across all locations was positively received by participants with 96% giving a top two box rating for overall enjoyment. An impressive 83% nationally claimed to be likely to participate in 2011.

Participation and being part of ‘something big’ emerged as the core drivers of event participation, together with receiving kits and medals as part of the experience.

The event is all about fun and enjoyment (66%) and increasing confidence and self-esteem (49%). Parents were pleased that ‘every child feels like a winner’.

Since the first event in 1999 participants in the Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon have collectively swum approximately 10,000km (200,000 lengths of an Olympic pool), cycled around 400,000km (10 times around the world) and run about 66,000km (more than five times around Australia)!

Exercise and Activity

After registering for the event more than half the children embarked on more exercise than they typically would, with 41% doing at least one to two more hours per week and 12% doing three or more hours per week. The remaining children maintained their level of existing exercise.

Hearteningly, the event also inspired 59% of kids to become involved in other sports and activities after registration and this motivation also had a positive impact on other family members in relation to doing more exercise. Some 70% of parents claimed their children would maintain levels of exercise post event.

Diet and Nutrition

Whilst there was no negative impact on dietary habits, little impact was seen on shifts in diet and nutrition during the course of pre event preparation, with only one in five children eating more healthily and the rest maintaining their existing levels of nutrition.

There was, however, an increase in the level of satisfaction amongst parents when it came to their child’s diet at the time of the event compared to when they initially registered for the event. This could be driven by seeing an increase in the general wellbeing of the child (via exercise and being active) compared to specific healthy eating practises. We also know from previous studies that parents are less concerned about specific dietary intake in comparison to their children being emotionally happy and confident.

“Surfing gives me freedom and that’s at the core of my being. I’m sure my passion releases the good chemicals in my body that help make me happy and healthy.”

Stephanie Gilmore, Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon ambassador and four-time World Surfing champion

supporting the cause



“My happiness index has always been proportionate with physical activity, so I’m a firm believer in active bodies contributing significantly to healthy minds.”

Guy Leech, MBF Ambassador and Iron Man legend



Australian fast bowling great Brett Lee is the national ambassador for the 2011 Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon, with support at a regional level from athletes such as Olympic gold medal-winning swimmers Libby Trickett and Leisel Jones, Australia’s original Iron Man hero Guy Leech, champion runner Craig Mottram, three-time world surfing champion Stephanie Gilmore and a host of AFL stars.



Thanks for taking the time to read this report and a big thank-you to all those who contributed, from health professionals and politicians through to ambassadors and event partners.

We trust it has been illuminating and we hope it raises awareness of the importance of a balanced and active lifestyle to increase self-esteem.

Our children are Australia’s greatest resource – and we need them to grow up healthy and happy to lead us into the future.





2011 Schedule

Event Date	Venue / City	Registration Closes
Sun 16 January 2011	AIS, Bruce (Canberra)	2 January 2011
Sun 23 January 2011	Peninsula Leisure Centre, Woy Woy (Central Coast)	9 January 2011
Sun 30 January 2011	Sydney Olympic Park	12 January 2011
Sun 6 February 2011	Midcourse Reserve, West Lakes (Adelaide)	20 January 2011
Sun 13 February 2011	Langley Park, East Perth	30 January 2011
Sun 6 March 2011	Eastern Beach, Geelong	20 February 2011
Sun 13 March 2011	Catani Gardens, St Kilda (Melbourne)	27 February 2011
Sun 17 April 2011	Low Oval, Logan (Brisbane)	3 April 2011
Sun 22 May 2011	Riverway, Townsville	4 May 2011

"I would encourage all parents and families to make regular sport and physical exercise that they like, a part of their family's fun and activity together to help our future generations of Australians to live longer, healthier, happier lives."

Dr Christine Bennett

