

Teens who play sports feel significantly healthier and happier about life

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(NaturalNews) Playing team sports is good for teenagers' mental as well as physical health, according to a study conducted by researchers from West Virginia University and published in the journal *Applied Research in Quality of Life*.

"Our study demonstrates the benefits of youth sports participation on self-rated health and life satisfaction among young youth at a critical juncture in adolescent development," the researchers wrote. "Our findings suggest that sports team participation may enhance school connectedness, social support and bonding among friends and teammates."

The researchers polled 245 female and male 7th and 8th graders aged 12 to 14 about their physical activity habits, their health, and their satisfaction with life. They found that self-reported health was no different among children who participated regularly in vigorous activity and those who did not. Among girls, physical activity was associated with improved life satisfaction, but no such result was seen in boys.

When the researchers compared those who participated in team sports with those who did not, however, they found that both boys and girls in the former group reported significantly more life satisfaction.

In addition, boys who did not play team sports were five times more likely to describe their health as fair/poor than those who did, while girls who did not play team sports were 30 times more likely.

Research on adults and older teenagers has firmly established a link between physical activity and improved mood, even in people suffering from clinical depression.

"Vigorous exercise can be an effective antidote to bouts of depression," writes Phyllis A. Balch in the book *Prescription for Nutritional Healing, 4th Edition*.

"Certain endorphins and other brain chemicals released in response to exercise also produce a natural 'high,'" Balch writes. "This may explain why exercise is the best way to get rid of depression."

The difference in results between team sports and other activities in the current study suggests that social as well as physiological effects may be at work.

"There's a lot of positive things that happen when people participate in sports," researcher Keith Zullig said. "There's communication, team building, and emotional benefits."