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2011

Movement skill mastery in a clinical sample of overweight and obese children

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Publication Details

Cliff, D. P., Okely, A. D. & Magarey, A. M. (2011). Movement skill mastery in a clinical sample of overweight and obese children. *International Journal of Pediatric Obesity*, 6 (5-6), 473-475.

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1 **Abstract**

2 This study describes the prevalence of fundamental movement skill (FMS) mastery and advanced
3 skill proficiency among treatment-seeking 6-10 year-old children with overweight/obesity. One
4 hundred and thirty-two participants (8.4 ± 1.0 years, BMI 24.2 ± 3.1 kg/m², 55% female, 76.5%
5 obese) were assessed on 12 FMS and compared with a normative sample. The prevalence of FMS
6 mastery was significantly lower among children categorized as overweight/obese for all skills
7 across all age groups (all $p < 0.05$). Excluding the leap for 6-7 year olds, differences between the
8 two samples remained when the prevalence of advance skill proficiency was examined for
9 children categorized as overweight/obese. Physical activity programs designed for children with
10 overweight/obesity need to address deficiencies in FMS proficiency as part of an overall strategy
11 to promote physical activity participation.

12 **Key words:** adiposity, exercise, motor activity, motor skills, pediatrics

14 **Introduction**

15 Children categorized as overweight/obese are less active than their non-overweight peers, and
16 children who are least active have the greatest adiposity gains. One correlate of children's physical
17 activity is their FMS proficiency (1, 2). These skills are the building blocks for participation in
18 many physical activities, and include locomotor (e.g., running) and object-control (e.g. throwing)
19 skills. This study describes the prevalence of FMS mastery among children with
20 overweight/obesity, and extends previous research by examining a younger and larger child
21 sample, and by applying a validated and more comprehensive FMS assessment battery than have
22 previously been studied (3, 4).

24 **Methods**

1 Data were collected as part of the Parenting Eating and Activity for Child Health (PEACH)
2 randomized controlled trial for the management of pediatric obesity (Australian Clinical Trials
3 Register [www.actr.org.au] 00001104) (5). Table I reports inclusion and exclusion criteria.
4 Families were recruited between June 2004 and May 2005 in Adelaide (n=86) and Sydney (n=83),
5 Australia. Of the 169 participating children categorised as overweight/obese (6), 146 completed
6 FMS assessments at baseline. Due to the age categories constructed in this study children under
7 six years (n=14) were excluded, leaving a final sample of 132. Ethics committees at Flinders
8 Medical Centre Clinical Research and the Children's Hospital at Westmead approved the study.
9 Parent informed written consent and child assent were obtained.

10

11

< **Insert Table 1 here** >

12

13 FMS were assessed using the Test of Gross Motor Development, 2nd edition (TGMD-2) (7). The
14 TGMD-2 comprises six locomotor skills and six object-control skills and has established validity
15 and reliability among 3-10 year-olds (7). Six trained assessors (three at each study site), completed
16 the assessments after demonstrating $\geq 90\%$ inter-rater reliability on pre-coded videotapes, as
17 previously described (3, 4). The battery was administered in small groups (≤ 4) following
18 standardised procedures, instructions and demonstrations. Skills were performed twice and skill
19 components were scored as present ("1") or absent ("0") for each trial. For each skill, the
20 proportion of the sample exhibiting mastery (i.e., exhibiting all skill components during both
21 trials) and advanced skill proficiency (i.e., exhibiting all or all but one component during both
22 trials) was calculated and compared with the TGMD-2 normative sample (n=1208) (7) using chi-
23 square analysis in SPSS 16.0. The TGMD-2 normative sample is representative of the United
24 States (US) population in regards to geographic region, gender, ethnicity, rural or urban
25 residence, parent education and disability. Participants were categorized into age groups for the
26 analyses, with the groups formed by combining adjacent ages (e.g. 6 and 7 years) with the most

1 similar proportions of participants exhibiting mastery for each individual skill in the TGMD-2
2 normative sample (age groups for the underhand roll and striking a stationary ball: 7-8 years and
3 9-10 years; all other FMS: 6-7 years and 8-10 years). The prevalence of mastery for each age
4 group from the TGMD-2 normative sample was calculated by averaging the proportions for each
5 age. Results were considered statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.

6

7 **Results**

8 Baseline demographic and anthropometric data are presented in Table I. The prevalence of
9 mastery was significantly lower among children with overweight/obesity compared with the
10 normative sample for all 12 skills across all age groups (all $p < 0.05$) (Table II). Excluding the leap
11 for 6-7 year-olds, differences remained when the prevalence of advanced skill proficiency in this
12 sample was compared with mastery in the normative sample.

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< Insert Table 2 here >

15

16 **Discussion**

17 This study supports the findings of previous research suggesting that children with
18 overweight/obesity have lower FMS proficiency than is typical for their age (3, 4). To our
19 knowledge this is the first study to compare the prevalence of mastery of individual FMS
20 between a large clinical sample of children categorized as overweight/obese and normative data,
21 using a validated and comprehensive assessment battery . The difference in FMS mastery
22 exhibited in this sample compared with normative data was more prominent than has previously
23 been reported (3, 4), possibly because of the higher proportion of females, and that >75% were
24 categorized as obese.

25

26

Among children, FMS are beneficially associated with physical activity, cardiorespiratory
fitness and psychosocial outcomes (1), and childhood FMS proficiency appears to predict

1 physical activity and fitness in adolescence (1). Low FMS proficiency among children with
2 overweight/obesity might therefore act as a barrier precluding participation in adiposity-reducing
3 physical activity, perpetuating the cycle of unhealthy weight gain.

4 As the current sample consisted of treatment-seeking children, the findings might only be
5 generalizable to those children with overweight/obesity enrolling in weight management
6 programs. The use of US normative data may be a limitation but there are no normative
7 Australian data for the TGMD-2. However the majority of the FMS evaluated in the TGMD-2
8 are targeted in Australian primary school physical education curricula and used in popular sports.
9 Thus, it seems unlikely that the findings are due to cultural differences in the mastery of the
10 assessed skills.

11 Based on these results, we recommend that physical activity programs for children with
12 overweight/obesity address deficiencies in FMS proficiency in order to foster movement
13 capabilities required for adoption of an active lifestyle. Longitudinal research is required to
14 understand the causal and temporal nature of the relationships between FMS, physical activity,
15 and obesity among young people.

16

17 **Acknowledgements**

18 We thank participating families, and the research assistants. This study was supported by a
19 National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia project grant (275226). Dylan Cliff is
20 funded by a National Heart Foundation of Australia – Macquarie Fellowship.

21

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1 Table I Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the PEACH study and descriptive characteristics
 2 of participating children (n=132)^a
 3
 4

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Descriptive Characteristic	Mean (SD) or % (n)
Aged 5-9 years ^b at initial baseline assessment	BMI z-score >4.0	Age (years)	8.4 (1.0)
Overweight or obese ^c	Known syndromal cause of obesity	Female	55.3 (73)
Pre-pubertal (Tanner Stage 1)	Taking medications influencing weight gain or loss	BMI (kg/m ²)	24.2 (3.1)
Care-giver able to attend sessions, read and understand English	Physical or developmental disability, chronic illness or significant dietary restriction	BMI z-score	2.7 (0.6)
	Sibling was enrolled in the study	Obese ^c	76.5 (101)

BMI: body mass index; ^a n=132 of 169 children enrolled in PEACH due to: children <6 years being excluded from current analyses (n=14), children unable to attend the FMS assessment (n=19), injury (n=3), incomplete data entry for FMS (n=1). There were no statistically significant differences between participants with and without FMS data for age, percentage girls, BMI, or BMI z-score (all p>0.05).^bselected as they had not yet experienced a pubertal growth spurt and were post-adiposity rebound;^cIOTF definitions (6).

Table II Prevalence (%) of FMS mastery^a in the normative sample (9) and mastery and advanced skill proficiency^b in the overweight/obese sample^c

FMS	6-7 years			6-7 years			8-10 years			8-10 years		
	FMS mastery		P	Advanced skill proficiency		P	FMS mastery		P	Advanced skill proficiency		
	Normative (n = 311)	Overweight/obese (n = 39) (n)		Overweight/obese (n = 39) (n)	Overweight/obese (n = 93) (n)		Normative (n = 565)	Overweight/obese (n = 93) (n)		Overweight/obese (n = 93) (n)	P	Overweight/obese (n = 93) (n)
Locomotor												
Run	78	5 (2)	<0.001	13 (5)	<0.001	85	22 (20)	<0.001	31 (29)	<0.001		
Gallop	43	3 (1)	<0.001	5 (2)	<0.001	55	3 (3)	<0.001	8 (7)	<0.001		
Hop	37	0 (0)	N/A	0 (0)	N/A	51	3 (3)	<0.001	7 (6)	<0.001		
Leap	25	10 (4)	0.028	13 (5)	0.067	45	7 (6)	<0.001	19 (18)	<0.001		
Horizontal Jump	33	3 (1)	<0.001	8 (3)	0.001	44	7 (6)	<0.001	14 (13)	<0.001		
Slide	60	15 (6)	<0.001	21 (8)	<0.001	81	37 (34)	<0.001	47 (44)	<0.001		
Object-control												
Stationary basketball dribble	31	5 (2)	0.001	8 (3)	0.002	66	29 (27)	<0.001	41 (38)	<0.001		
Catch	43	10 (4)	<0.001	18 (7)	0.001	77	43 (40)	<0.001	65 (60)	0.003		
Kick	34	3 (1)	<0.001	5 (2)	<0.001	65	26 (24)	<0.001	39 (36)	<0.001		
Overhand throw	25	8 (3)	0.010	10 (4)	0.028	52	18 (17)	<0.001	30 (28)	<0.001		
FMS	7-8 years			7-8 years			9-10 years			9-10 years		
	FMS mastery		P	Advanced skill proficiency		P	FMS mastery		P	Advanced skill proficiency		
	Normative (n = 372)	Overweight/obese (n = 66) (n)		Overweight/obese (n = 66) (n)	Overweight/obese (n = 49) (n)		Normative (n = 358)	Overweight/obese (N = 49) (n)		Overweight/obese (n = 49) (n)	P	Overweight/obese (n = 49) (n)
Object-control												
Striking a stationary ball	38	11 (7)	<0.001	23 (15)	0.011	48	12 (6)	<0.001	27 (13)	0.002		
Underhand roll	38	2 (1)	<0.001	5 (3)	<0.001	41	10 (5)	<0.001	20 (10)	0.002		

FMS: fundamental movement skill; ^aFMS mastery: possessing all skill components during two trials; ^bAdvanced skill proficiency: possessing all skill components or all but one component during two trials. This category was used for the overweight/obese sample and compared against the prevalence of FMS mastery in the normative sample; ^cthe overweight/obese sample was compared to the same age group in the TGMD-2 normative sample for each skill; N/A: Not applicable as the prevalence of mastery/advanced skill proficiency for the overweight/obese sample = 0.