Active for Life Year 5: a cluster randomised controlled trial of a primary school-based intervention to increase levels of physical activity, decrease sedentary behaviour and improve diet

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Plain English summary

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We investigated if training teachers and providing them with materials for lessons and homework helped 10-year-old children to adopt healthier behaviours. The teaching programme, called Active for Life Year 5 (AFLY5), included 16 lessons and 10 homework assignments. It was given to children in 30 primary schools in year 5, at the end of which the children from those schools were compared with children from 30 control schools that did not have the AFLY5 intervention. Whether or not the schools were given AFLY5 was decided randomly (e.g. by flipping a coin). We studied both sets of children at the end of year 5 and again at the end of year 6 (during which no schools had AFLY5). We found that children from schools that received AFLY5 were neither more active nor less sedentary than those from the control schools. They also did not eat any more fruit and vegetables. Children from schools that had the AFLY5 intervention spent less time at weekends looking at screens (e.g. televisions or computers) and ate fewer snacks and drank fewer servings of high-energy drinks than children from control schools. Our study, which also included interviews with teachers, parents and children, suggests that more substantial changes in schools than the ones that we tested, and also changes in families and communities, might be necessary to get children to adopt healthier behaviours.
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