

## **Get Off that Couch and Play!**

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The presence of competitive sports teams in public schools has come under fire in the media recently. While some argue that competition is damaging to young people and spotlight the rare incidences of sports injuries, the benefits are significant.

First and foremost, when team sports are an important part of a school's culture, the halo around sports leads more young people to become involved in them, and this is especially important during adolescence when students are developing self-images and social skills.

Competitive sports are a great way to get kids active. In a nation with an obesity epidemic and a rate of diabetes that continues to grow, physical activity is becoming more and more important. Participating on teams can teach young people how to live healthy lifestyles.

Competitive sports have other benefits, beyond just building physical strength and influencing a healthy lifestyle. The challenges young people encounter when participating in competitive sports mirror those they will encounter in their lives. Students learn important life skills such as how to accept criticism, how to handle oneself under the pressure of competition, how to work hard toward a goal, how to win and lose graciously.

Many children who compete on sports teams also experience a heightened sense of belonging to something larger, and have shown increased signs of confidence and self-esteem.