

1 Article

# 2 Back-Health-Related Physical Activity and Exercise 3 Knowledge in Adolescents

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8 **Abstract:** The aim of this study was to analyze the level of specific back-health-related physical  
9 activity and exercise knowledge. This is a cross-sectional study. A representative sample of 1500  
10 students were recruited with a confidence level of 95% and an accepted standard error of  $\pm 2.53\%$ .  
11 Individuals were aged between 13 and 18 years old (mean age = 15.18; SD =  $\pm 1.446$ ). Self-reported  
12 questionnaires were used to record back-health-related physical activity and exercise knowledge  
13 concerning back care in adolescents. The level of specific knowledge of back health education  
14 related to physical activity and exercise in adolescents was low ( $X = 2.05$ , SD =  $\pm 2.264$ ). Only 10.9%  
15 of the students passed the specific knowledge test, achieving a grade equal or superior to 5. The  
16 boys average score was higher ( $X = 2.17$ , SD =  $\pm 2.312$ ) than the girls ( $X = 1.94$ , SD =  $\pm 2.212$ ) with  
17 statistically significant differences ( $p = .048$ ). The level of specific knowledge increased with age ( $F$   
18 = 11.531;  $p < .001$ ). High school students have a low level of specific knowledge. Physical Education  
19 teachers should apply the conceptual content properly. Knowledge is the first step towards  
20 changing behavioral habits. Back care education in the school curriculum is recommended.

21 **Keywords:** Physical Education, knowledge, proper exercise, back care, adolescents

22

## 23 1. Introduction

24 Several studies have recognized the importance of improving the knowledge students have  
25 about fitness and health (1, 2). It is stated that better domain knowledge about fitness and health,  
26 such as the valuation of its physical form, training objectives, and the application of FITT (frequency,  
27 intensity, time and type of exercise) may improve physical activity, improving active lifestyles (3, 4)  
28 and therefore people's health and quality of life .

29 For Limon et al. (5) there is an urgent need for health promotion programs which seek to increase  
30 knowledge in the field of back health in the education system. These must involve teachers, parents  
31 and students themselves, so they can produce the necessary changes. Related to this, numerous  
32 studies involving the assessment of knowledge about back care in the school population concluded  
33 that back education programs in schools are an effective strategy for the conceptual development of  
34 the content of back health within the educational curriculum (6-30).

35 Ads back pain, one of the most important tools to prevent this, or to minimize the frequency and  
36 severity of the symptoms once produced, is the acquisition of knowledge on lower back health (31).  
37 Because we must not forget that the prevalence of LBP in schools is high (32, 33), and in Valencia,  
38 Spain, the level is 44.5%, according to Miñana-Signes and Monfort-Pañego (34). However, we know  
39 that knowledge per se is probably not enough to change habits and healthy behaviors of individuals  
40 (35-37). However, in order for habits to become the key element for the improvement of health care,  
41 and specifically the back health, access to knowledge and information should be the first step in the  
42 teaching-learning process, to establish healthy physical activity habits (38, 39). It is widely accepted  
43 that voluntary behaviors are influenced by the corresponding knowledge (40) and there are specific,  
44 validated and reliable instruments to assess postural habits at school age (41, 42). Related to this,  
45 education can contribute to the development of an improved lifestyle through improving physical  
46 fitness and the proper execution of daily activities (31).

47 Therefore, a body of knowledge about the proper use of the back is necessary to prevent back  
48 injuries (Schwartz and Jacobs (8), and Vicas-Kunse (6). According to a recent article (43), it is  
49 important to determine the level of specific knowledge about back health related to activity and  
50 exercise in students. Moreover, it is also important to know if this level of knowledge could be  
51 considered as an indicator related to students with, or without, low back pain, and if it could be  
52 interpreted as a preventative factor or risk indicator. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the level  
53 of specific knowledge of back health related to the practice of physical activity and exercise in a  
54 sample of adolescents.

## 55 2. Materials and Methods

### 56 2.1 Study design

57 A cross-sectional study design was performed.

### 58 2.2 Subject population

59 The study population consists of students in high school in the Valencian Community, Spain  
60 (N= 247714). The sample under study was selected based on convenience of a non-probabilistic  
61 sampling, and by quotas during the school years 2009-2013.

62 The study included healthy adolescents aged 12 to 18 years old, and students belonging to the  
63 eleven Secondary Schools selected from amongst public and private schools. Students with  
64 disabilities: lesions of the spinal cord (i.e. spina bifida, quadriplegia, etc.), Cerebral palsy, Down  
65 syndrome, autism, tumors, etc., and those who did not show up the day of the test, were excluded.

### 66 2.3 Data collection

67 The questionnaires were filled out during Physical Education (PE) classes using the Google  
68 Drive application in the computer rooms of the centers participating in the study. An experienced  
69 researcher presented the questionnaire to the students, explained the procedure and rules for filling  
70 in the survey, and personally dealt with all the queries that individuals had. The management of the  
71 centers, each group tutor and the parents were informed of the study and gave their written consent.  
72 Besides, we obtained institutional ethical approval by the Ethics Committee in experimental research  
73 from the University of Valencia.

### 74 2.4 Instrument

75 Measurement of specific knowledge related to physical activity practice and exercise.  
76 Individuals were required to complete a questionnaire to assess Back-hEalth-related pHysical  
77 actiVity and exercise kNowleDge (BEHIND) (44). The questionnaire was designed to identify  
78 knowledge about physical abilities such as strength, endurance, muscular flexibility, and proper  
79 exercise regarding posture and duration. The students were assessed using a 10-point scale. Students  
80 who achieved 5 points or higher passed the test.

81 This questionnaire was validated in a previous study among 230 Spanish students aged 13 to 18  
82 years old, achieving good test-retest reliability, Cronbach's Alpha being .80 and the intraclass  
83 correlation coefficient being .80 ( $p < .01$ ).

### 84 2.5 Data analysis

85 Descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations were performed to represent  
86 specific knowledge between gender and age groups. To assess the level of knowledge, we used a 10-  
87 point scale and percentiles for "global score", because this was not normally distributed. Student's t-  
88 test and analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) was used at the significance level  $p < .05$ . Statistical  
89 analysis was conducted using SPSS v.18.

90

### 91 3. Results

#### 92 3.1 Translation and cross-cultural adaptation

93 During the first step (forward translation) analysis, the APSOM decided not do any change. Step  
 94 2 (backward translation) was identical to the original questionnaire in Portuguese (SL). In the third  
 95 step no major problems were encountered during the forward translation and backward translation  
 96 phases of the Brazilian version, and the APSOM did not suggest amendments to words or phrases.  
 97 Step 4 (Expert Committee): The committee used three rounds to accomplish the objective of the study,  
 98 the production of a prefinal version for field testing. Each expert scored 88 items in the respective  
 99 rounds.

#### 100 3.1 Descriptive analysis and univariate analysis.

101 A representative sample of 1500 students were recruited with a confidence level of 95% and an  
 102 accepted standard error of  $\pm 2.53\%$ . Individuals were aged between 13 and 18 years old (mean age =  
 103 15.18; SD =  $\pm 1.446$ ). 51.6% were boys (n = 771; mean age = 15.25; SD =  $\pm 1.437$ ) and 48.4% were girls (n  
 104 = 723; mean age = 15.10; SD =  $\pm 1.452$ ).

#### 105 3.1.1 Specific level of knowledge

106 The sample of adolescents showed a low level of specific knowledge of health and back care  
 107 education related to physical activity and exercise (X = 2.05, SD =  $\pm 2.264$ ).

108 In general, only 10.9% of the students passed the specific knowledge test, achieving a score equal  
 109 or superior to 5 points, while 89.1% students failed the test.

110 Based on the categorization of scores followed by the Spanish educational system, Table 1 shows  
 111 the final grades. A total of 70 students completed the BEHIND, achieving a grade equal or superior  
 112 to the classification, "good".

113 **Table 1** Distribution of the students' scores.

	n	%
Very poor [ $\leq 2.9$ ]	901	60.1
Poor [3-4.9]	435	29.0
Average [5-5.9]	92	6.1
Good [6-6.9]	38	2.5
Very good [7-8.9]	30	2.0
Excellent [ $\geq 9$ ]	2	.1
Total	1500	100.0

114 Regarding the contents related to the specific muscles involved in strengthening the back and  
 115 back health, only 40% (n = 584) answered the item correctly.

117 Almost half of the students (46.1%; n = 673) correctly answered the item concerning the proper  
 118 implementation of exercise to strengthen the lower back muscles.

119 Only 40% (n = 582) of the students correctly answered the item concerning the correct  
 120 performance of isometric exercises to strengthen the abdominal muscles.

121 A third of the students (33.3%; n = 485), correctly answered the item related to the proper  
 122 execution of exercises to strengthen abdominal muscles, and in particular concerning the position of  
 123 the legs to protect the health of the back.

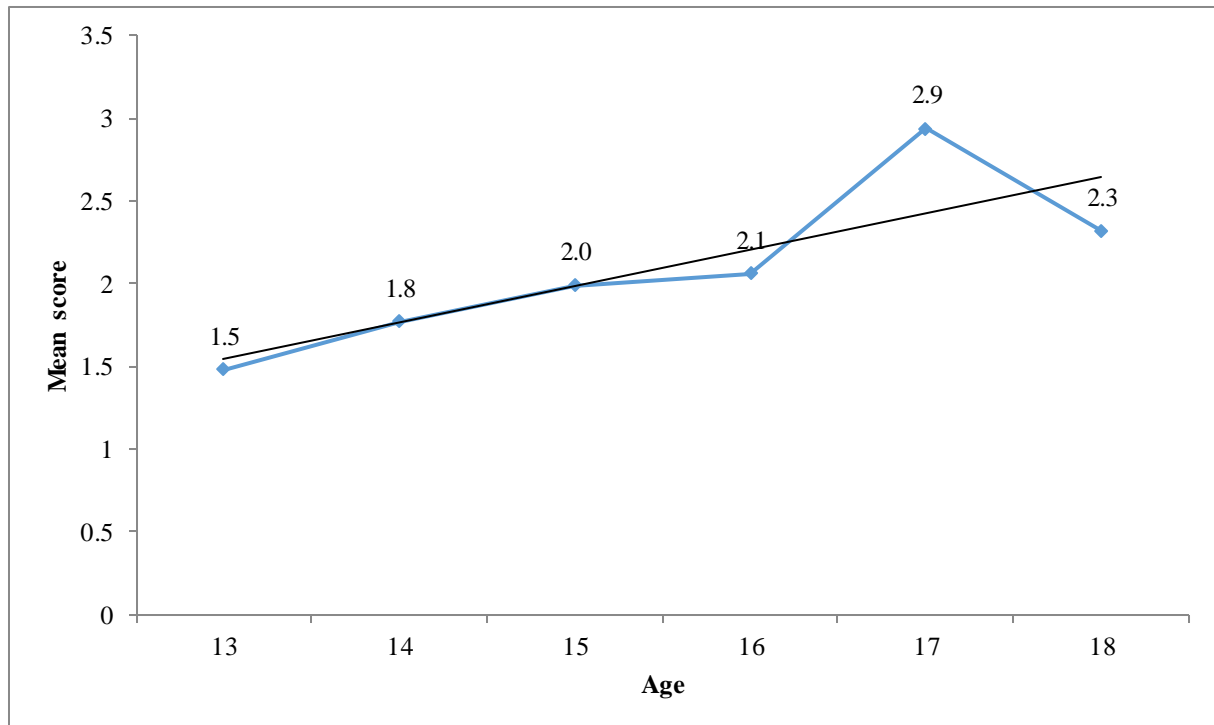
124 Approximately 40% (n = 577) of the students correctly answered the item related to the correct  
 125 execution of exercises to strengthen abdominal muscles, and in particular on the degree of trunk  
 126 flexion for the healthy development of trunk muscles.

127 Regarding the cool down exercise contents, it was found that nearly 17% (n = 243) of the students  
 128 knew the specific muscle to stretch to improve the health and care of the back.

129 Related to the concept of joint movements which are not recommended, such as hyperextension  
 130 and hyperflexion of the spine, only 21.9% (n = 318) of the students were able to correctly answer the  
 131 question.

132 With regard to gender, the boys ( $X = 2.17$ ,  $SD = \pm 2.312$ ) average score was higher than the girls  
 133 ( $X = 1.94$ ,  $SD = \pm 2.212$ ), with statistically significant differences ( $p = .048$ ).

134 The group of 17-year olds obtained the highest scores. Except for the group of 18-year olds,  
 135 adolescents increased their knowledge on a regular basis based on their increasing age, with  
 136 statistically significant differences ( $F = 11.531$ ;  $p < .001$ ) (Figure 1).



137

138

Figure 1 Mean scores by age groups

#### 139 4. Discussion

140 This survey aimed to evaluate the level of specific knowledge concerning health and back care  
 141 related to physical activity. A cross-sectional study was carried out, therefore it is only possible to  
 142 show an association with variables, but not to demonstrate causality.

143 Students from the Valencian Community demonstrated that they have a very low level of  
 144 specific back health related physical activity knowledge scoring a mean of 2 points in the  
 145 questionnaire.

146 The levels were so low that only 10.9% of students passed the specific knowledge test, achieving  
 147 a grade equal or superior to 5, similar to another study (45). However, a total of 70 students filled in  
 148 the test, achieving a grade equal or superior to "good". Among them, 30 students achieved a  
 149 classification of "very good", and 2 people got the highest score. Therefore, we can say that it is  
 150 possible to successfully pass the exam and be familiar with the content related to back health and  
 151 physical exercise.

152 With regard to sexes, the boys scored significantly better than the girls. This could be because  
 153 boys tend to play sports more often than girls (46-49). The boys could be more informed about issues  
 154 related to the practice of physical activity and exercise. In addition, physically active children were  
 155 associated with physically active parents and best friends, compared to inactive children (50). Specific  
 156 knowledge significantly increased with age. This seems obvious, since over time adolescents  
 157 accumulate new experiences and learning.

158 Concerning the items, we can say that students have sufficient knowledge related to contents  
 159 concerning physical qualities, frequency of exercise per week, the proper execution of lumbar

160 strengthening exercises, and the proper development and duration of stretching exercises. In  
161 addition, gaps were observed related to the specific content and muscles involved in strengthening  
162 the back and back health, the proper execution of abdominal strengthening exercises (questioned in  
163 3 items), and the specific muscles involved in the concept of joint movements which should be  
164 discouraged, such as hyperextension and hyperflexion of the spine.

165 Agreeing with our results, most of the assessments carried out on students concerning levels  
166 of knowledge about back health were found to be very low before the implementation of the  
167 intervention program (11-13, 15, 19, 21, 23, 28, 51, 52). Related to this, the results of studies that  
168 examined the level of knowledge in the field of physical education and health, also drew attention to  
169 the low level attained by students, not approaching the minimum level of proficiency in knowledge  
170 and understanding (45, 53). The results reinforce what Tellez stated (54) when he called attention to  
171 the fact that "students generally completely lack basic knowledge about the theory of the subject  
172 matter". For these reasons, it is important to consider whether the content related to postural  
173 education is well-framed in the official curriculum, if teachers present said content in their classroom  
174 programs, and whether they have sufficient and appropriate knowledge about the subject (14, 24, 55).  
175 On the other hand, and based on the experience in the professional field of physical education  
176 teaching, we know that the PE is considered a highly practical subject.

177 In assessment criteria, PE programming evaluates three aspects: concepts, procedures and  
178 attitude, with the conceptual area usually representing 20% of the mark. In order to take advantage  
179 of this low percentage, it requires a methodology that allows procedural contents to strengthen the  
180 conceptual contents and vice versa. To improve healthy habits in students, it is important for PE  
181 teachers to encourage the practice of physical activity and sport, but we must not forget the  
182 interdisciplinary and comprehensive character that the subject has.

#### 183 *4.1 Implications for Practice*

184 From a welfare-oriented perspective, we want to know if the students' knowledge about back  
185 health-related physical activity is related to the existence or absence of pain. Also, we would like to  
186 know if it could be interpreted as a preventive factor or indicator of risk, or if the students' knowledge  
187 influences the acquisition of habits of active lifestyles, postural habits or engaging in regular  
188 organized physical activity.

189 Furthermore, from an educational point of view the assessment of the students' knowledge is  
190 organized by the education system and prescribed in the official curriculum. For this reason, it is  
191 important to check what the students know and can do after completing their compulsory  
192 education (37). Therefore, determining the actual knowledge possessed by students about health-  
193 related postural education at different levels of education directly involves more participation of  
194 professionals in PE, and as a result the use of measuring instruments to determine the degree of  
195 knowledge of students.

196 Meanwhile, to be able to assess what interventions of health education and back care are needed  
197 (what the students do not know about back care and health), and to also check the effectiveness of  
198 the implemented interventions, it would be desirable to administer a complementary knowledge  
199 questionnaire (56) in order to assess the knowledge that students have about this topic, related to  
200 health and taking care of one's back.

## 201 **5. Conclusions**

202 High school students have a low level of specific knowledge. Physical Education teachers should  
203 review the postural education contents in their teaching programs. Knowledge is the first step in  
204 order to change behavioral habits. Back health education in the school curriculum is recommended.

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206 software, all the authors; validation, all the authors; formal analysis, all the authors; data curation, Miñana-  
207 Signes; writing—original draft preparation, Miñana-Signes; writing—review and editing, all the authors;  
208 visualization, Monfort-Pañego; supervision, Monfort-Pañego; project administration, Miñana-Signes. All  
209 authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript."

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