

## RedBranch Newsletter September 2006

Welcome to the RedBranch newsletter, where we bring health-related information to subscribers on a monthly basis. RedBranch are a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to positively influencing the modern lifestyle. You can find more information on our website: [www.red-branch.com](http://www.red-branch.com)

### **It's Official: Vigorous Exercise is Good for Grades!**

A recent American study found that children who participated in vigorous physical activity tended to have higher academic grades than children who were less active. The most physically active students performed on average 10% better on core Maths, science and English tests than their sedentary counterparts. The study found that simply doing PE did not by itself raise grades, and that taking part in vigorous activity at least 3 times per week was associated with the best academic performance. Vigorous activity includes sports (like football, hurling, camogie, soccer & rugby) as well as non-standard activities like skateboarding and dance. We already know that being physically active can help prevent heart disease, stroke and certain cancers...so now we have yet another reason to promote physical activity in children. Getting young people to take part in vigorous activity is easier said than done, and may need a bit of imagination. [Contact RedBranch](#) if you'd like some ideas on how best to promote physical activity in your school. You can find [information on physical activity](#) on our website.

### **Latvia Bans the Sale of Junk Food in Schools**

Latvia has become the first EU country to ban the sale of junk food in schools. The ban, which comes into place from 1<sup>st</sup> November, will include soft drinks such as Coca-Cola, crisps, sweets and foodstuffs containing artificial colourings or flavourings. The ban was initiated by health ministry officials, in response to growing concern regarding nutrition in children. International experts have praised Latvia for taking this measure: "What happened in Latvia is a major step, very welcome news," said Neville Rigby, of the London-based International Association for the Study of Obesity. "Selling junk food in schools sets a bad example. It gives a sense that junk food is endorsed by authorities." The ban has also received support from School Principals.

Many of the same concerns regarding children's health also apply in Ireland, with our school surveys highlighting the fact that Irish children consume large amounts of unhealthy junk food. Some of the best selling soft-drinks vending machines in the Country are sited in schools. The World Health Organisation recognises that foods high in sugar, salt and fat pose a major threat to the health of children. For more information on junk food, schools and health, [click here](#).

Children learn about healthy eating as part of the curriculum, even though foods that are unhealthily high in fat, sugar or salt may be promoted in school. When schools sell junk food, it gives the impression that junk food is endorsed by authorities. Children need to be educated and empowered so that they can make informed healthy choices about their diet, but it is crucial that the school environment should promote a culture of healthy eating. It is pointless talking to children about a healthy diet when junk food is so easily available at school. We think the Latvian ban is a good idea, and this is something we plan to push for in Ireland. Watch this space!

### **Campaign to "Hold on to Childhood"**

Junk food, exploitative marketing, accelerated adulthood and long hours passively watching TV are having a disastrous effect upon the development of children. A group of distinguished academics, psychologists, teachers, and children's authors in the UK have launched a campaign aimed at halting the "death" of childhood. In a letter to the Daily Telegraph, these experts have warned that childhood is being poisoned by modern "junk" culture...that real experiences are being replaced with TV and that real food is being displaced by junk food. You can [read more](#) about this issue on the RedBranch website.

According to Sue Palmer, author of "Toxic Childhood" and ex school principal, "children used to be free-range, and now they're practically battery children, living indoors, experiencing through the medium of a screen. And that, along with the food they're eating, many of them in great quantities now, is actually inhibiting brain development". Many of the issues raised in the UK campaign are also relevant to Irish youngsters. For example, our work with schools clearly shows that Irish schoolchildren commonly spend 4 hours per day in front a of a TV set...equivalent to 61 days per year devoted to passively watching TV. You can find more information on the effects of [heavy TV watching](#) on the RedBranch website.

**The Newsletter**

Please let as many people as possible know about our newsletter and the work we do with schools. We operate on an extremely tight budget, and we can only change things with your help!

If you would prefer not to receive future emails from us, simply email us and we will remove you from our distribution list.

Regards,

The RedBranch Team

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