A message from Brett Lee

We’re delighted to be running the Sanitarium Weet-Bix Kids TRYathlon in this, its 17th year. We’re proud of the fact that it’s the biggest event series of its kind in the world and even more so that it helps our own kids stay active and healthy.

The greatest challenges facing our kids today are obesity and mental health issues. Every year the research we do with parents confirms that around 91% of all kids’ self-esteem is improved as a result of participating in a Kids TRY event.

Kids TRYathlon is coming to Melbourne on the 8th of March 2015! The kids tell me it’s one of the best days they’ve ever had so if you haven’t given it a TRY yet, you really should. My fellow TRY Hero ambassadors and I particularly enjoy giving every child a gold medal and seeing the big smiles on their faces.

Now that your school’s registration has been activated, parents can register students online individually and will select their school as part of their registration. The number of students registering from your school will then be tallied automatically. Schools with 15 or more participants entered in the TRYathlon before entries close will go in a draw to win $5,000 cash towards a healthy initiative.

The article below shows the importance of physical activity.

Perhaps all families can get active over the holidays and encourage their children to train for the TRYathlon on 8th March 2015.

by Josie Booth, University of Dundee

Children who do more physical activity are likely to improve their health and it might also help them improve their school grades.

Those are the findings of recent research from Sweden which suggest that doubling the amount of time spent doing physical education at school has an impact on children’s academic achievement.

Schools and parents are often urged to do more to improve children’s physical activity - and the growing body of research on the links between PE and success at school might be just the carrot they need.

Physical inactivity is the fourth leading cause of death worldwide, an issue which urgently needs to be addressed. Current recommendations state that children and young people should be doing at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day at an intensity which is enough to increase the heart rate.

Generation of inactive children

But around the world, the number of children achieving these recommendations is low. A 2012 survey conducted by the World Health Organisation found that only 23% of 11-year-olds were doing the recommended levels of physical activity, a figure that varies greatly between countries.

Italy was one of the worst-performing countries, where 10% of boys and 7% of girls reported doing at least 60 minutes of physical activity, compared with Ireland, the top performer, where 43% of boys and 31% of girls
reported doing at least an hour a day.

The beneficial impact that physical activity has on our health has been well reported, so it’s surprising that so few young people are meeting the recommendations. As well as the health benefits, research has found that physical activity can have a positive impact on psychological factors such as depression and self-esteem in both adults and children.

Research has also shown that physical activity is beneficial for academic success. The recent Swedish study published in the Journal of School Health, reports that increasing the amount of physical activity school pupils were doing led to improvements in academic achievement.

Improving success rates

The study conducted by Lina Käll, Michael Nilsson and Thomas Lindén, involved all pupils of an elementary school taking part in “play and motion” activities run by a local sports clubs. Two sessions of activities lasting 30-45 minutes were embedded into the school schedule in addition to the two hours of physical exercise a week that was part of the regular timetable.

The researchers examined information about the number of children at the school meeting national learning goals in Swedish, Maths and English over a four-year period prior to the exercise programme starting and then five years after the programme started.

The performance of the school was then compared to the performance of three other schools from areas with similar socio-economic characteristics in terms of education, average income, unemployment and foreign citizenship.

The results suggest that pupils at the school who took part in the exercise programme were twice as likely to meet the national learning goals in all three subjects, compared with pupils at the schools which did not increase physical activity. So doubling the amount of physical activity during school time increased the proportion of pupils achieving these academic goals.

This is an exciting finding given the need to encourage increases in physical activity - and it is one which echoes other research in this area. But the study does have some limitations. Importantly, the amount of physical activity that children were doing outside of school was not examined either before the programme started or during it.

This is a problem because the levels of physical activity may have been particularly low prior to the programme starting for example, or may have decreased in the control schools. The gender composition of the schools was not taken into account either.

The Swedish study does however highlight that dedicating more time to PE in schools is certainly not detrimental to attainment, a finding which has been reported consistently.

Recent work by myself and colleagues has demonstrated the long-term impact of higher intensity physical activity. Increases of roughly 15 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity at the age of 11 were related to increased performance in academic subjects five years later.

Yet this finding was in the context of relatively low levels of physical activity and differing patterns emerged for girls and boys. These factors should therefore be taken into account when planning further school-based interventions.