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The Daily Mile

Why and how you should introduce it to your school



University of the
Highlands and Islands
Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd
agus nan Eilean



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The keys to introducing The Daily Mile at your primary school

What is it?

15 minutes of activity: not one mile

Despite its name, The Daily Mile should take 15 minutes in total – from the moment pupils leave the classroom to when they return – rather than focus on the distance covered. This is to ensure that pupils finish at the same time and helps the teacher to coordinate the activity. Pupils who run for the full duration will complete approximately one mile.

Running, jogging or walking

This keeps it simple and inclusive. When schools tried other activities (e.g. skipping), the time spent on logistics – and the skill level required by the pupils – meant that the activity was not sustainable.

Exercise at a self-selected pace

Children should be encouraged to progress towards running but can complete The Daily Mile at a self-selected pace. This ensures it caters for all abilities and creates opportunities for improvements to be made.

Simple to implement – no need to get changed

No special clothing or footwear is required, and pupils can complete The Daily Mile in their school uniform. Some pupils do choose to change their shoes and, depending on the weather, jackets may be worn. If pupils' shoes are unsuitable, teachers can ask children to walk rather than run.

A social activity involving the teacher

Most teachers take part in The Daily Mile. It has been suggested that The Daily Mile can create opportunities for teachers to have informal conversations with pupils. The environment for The Daily Mile is less formal than the classroom and is often seen as downtime, or non-educational time, when teachers can ‘check in’ with specific pupils and discuss issues not related to their work or education. It is also a positive environment for children to engage with others in their class and throughout the school.

Where is it done?

Typically a circular route (laps)

Most schools establish a circular route, outdoors, that allows pupils to complete several laps. When the pupils get outside they know the direction of flow and start straight from the door so there are minimal, if any, instructions. By using laps, it prevents there being winners and losers and means that faster and slower pupils can take part together. Children can count the laps as a way to keep motivated and monitor improvements.



Children visible within schools grounds

While it may be possible to perform The Daily Mile offsite, the logistics and supervision requirements (e.g. the need for parent helpers, maintaining staff-student ratio) take away from the simplicity and flexibility of The Daily Mile and may require daily risk assessments. Most schools choose a route where the children are visible to the teacher most of the time.

On any surface – but all-weather is best

Any surface that the children would usually play on during break times is suitable for The Daily Mile. However, avoiding mud, puddles and wet grass is advisable when possible.

When is it done?

On most days

While at least three times a week is a minimum goal and five days per week is the aspiration, there must be flexibility with other activities in the busy school schedule.

In class time - when the teacher decides

The Daily Mile provides teachers with an opportunity to re-energise and refocus their pupils. Teachers use their knowledge of their class, and classroom activities, when making decisions about when in the day they do The Daily Mile, while others choose to schedule it in on the school timetable. Some schools schedule classes to go out in either the morning or afternoon (at a time suitable to the teacher) to ensure that too many children are not out at once.

In any weather (within bounds of school policy)

Normal wet / cold weather policy is used to decide if pupils can go outside. Some schools limit the children to walking if the underfoot conditions are very wet or slippery.

What needs to happen?

An initial risk assessment

The initial risk assessment is no different to any other activity that occurs at the school and is continual: teachers assess the risk on an ongoing basis. Some schools engage the children in this process to improve ownership of the risk.

Opportunity to link to curriculum

Some schools choose to link The Daily Mile to the curriculum throughout the year. This is typically related to maths (number of laps and distances), geography (distance to countries), or health topics (linking to sporting events or human biology).

A whole school approach

The Daily Mile is typically something the whole school participates in. Engaging teachers in the creation of The Daily Mile prior to implementation might be beneficial.



The Daily Mile is good for physical health

The Daily Mile has been shown to improve the fitness of primary school children by 5%¹

There is evidence of a decline in children's fitness in recent decades. This is seen as an increase in resting heart rates and a worsening of performance in the 20 metre shuttle run (an indicator of physical endurance fitness, also known as the bleep test). Low fitness is associated with a number of risk factors for non-communicable or chronic disease and adverse health outcomes (such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, some cancers, low mood and poor cognitive function). Improved fitness should reduce the chance of children suffering from these diseases in later life.



The Daily Mile has been shown to reduce the amount of fat on primary school children by 4%²

Overweight and obesity rates are global problems and considered to be a key target for the World Health Organisation. In Scotland, 30% of children (29% for boys and 32% for girls) aged 7-11 years were overweight or obese in 2015, a figure similar to that in England. Reducing the amount of fat children carry should ultimately reduce the risk of children becoming obese or developing diabetes in later life.

The Daily Mile has been shown to increase the physical activity levels of primary school children by 15%³

Low levels of physical activity are associated with the same risk factors linked to low levels of fitness, as outlined above. Increasing physical activity levels in children should decrease their chances of suffering from these conditions.

The Daily Mile has been shown to reduce the sedentary behaviour of primary school children by 5%⁴

In some studies, the amount of sedentary time (*i.e.* lying, sitting or reclining while alert) appears to be a predictor of chronic disease independent of physical activity levels: even when an individual's physical activity levels are taken into account, higher sitting time is a predictor of higher chronic disease risk. Two aspects of sedentary behaviour appear to be key to this: total sedentary time and prolonged blocks of sedentary time. The Daily Mile is potentially able to address both of these issues. Reducing sedentary behaviour should reduce the risk of chronic disease.

¹ Equivalent to 39 m increase in the shuttle run for the average primary school child (8 years and 10 months of age).

² Equivalent to 1.4 mm reduction in sum of 4 skinfolds for the average primary school child (8 years and 10 months of age).

³ Equivalent to 9 minutes increase of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) per day for the average primary school child (8 years and 10 months of age).

⁴ Equivalent to 18 minutes decrease of sedentary time per day for the average primary school child (8 years and 10 months of age).



Find out more

Read more about Stirling's research into The Daily Mile here: stir.ac.uk/thedailymile and for further information please contact dailymileresearch@gmail.com



For a copy of the research published by BMC Medicine, visit: stir.ac.uk/1mi

For a copy of the research published by PLOS ONE, visit: stir.ac.uk/1w4



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