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Physical Activity, Not Diet, is the Best Bet for School-Based Obesity Prevention

Research Digest



University of Strathclyde Glasgow

What the research study did and found; Scottish context

Further analysis of a Cochrane (systematic) review of school-based obesity prevention interventions which targeted one or more of the key behaviours which cause and maintain obesity: physical activity, diet, screen time, sleep.

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Targeting increased physical activity was the most effective option, though targeting the other behaviours was also helpful; targeting multiple behaviours was helpful. https://bmjpublichealth.bmj.com/content/3/1/e001707

Scottish obesity policy focuses almost entirely on diet. Physical activity should be a cornerstone of tackling childhood obesity in Scotland and has many other benefits beyond obesity prevention. Too much screen time and too little sleep are also major drivers of childhood obesity not targeted in Scottish obesity policy to date.

Davies et al. (2025). Factors associated with the effectiveness of interventions to prevent obesity in children: a synthesis of evidence from 204 randomised trials.

Scotland Moves Research Digests

Scotland Moves research digests are summaries of potentially transformative recent research studies, covering important health behaviours (physical activity, screen time, sleep, diet), outcomes (obesity, physical fitness, motor competence, physical literacy, early childhood development), influences on those behaviours and outcomes (policy, community and environment, family and peers, schools), and inequalities (by age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status).



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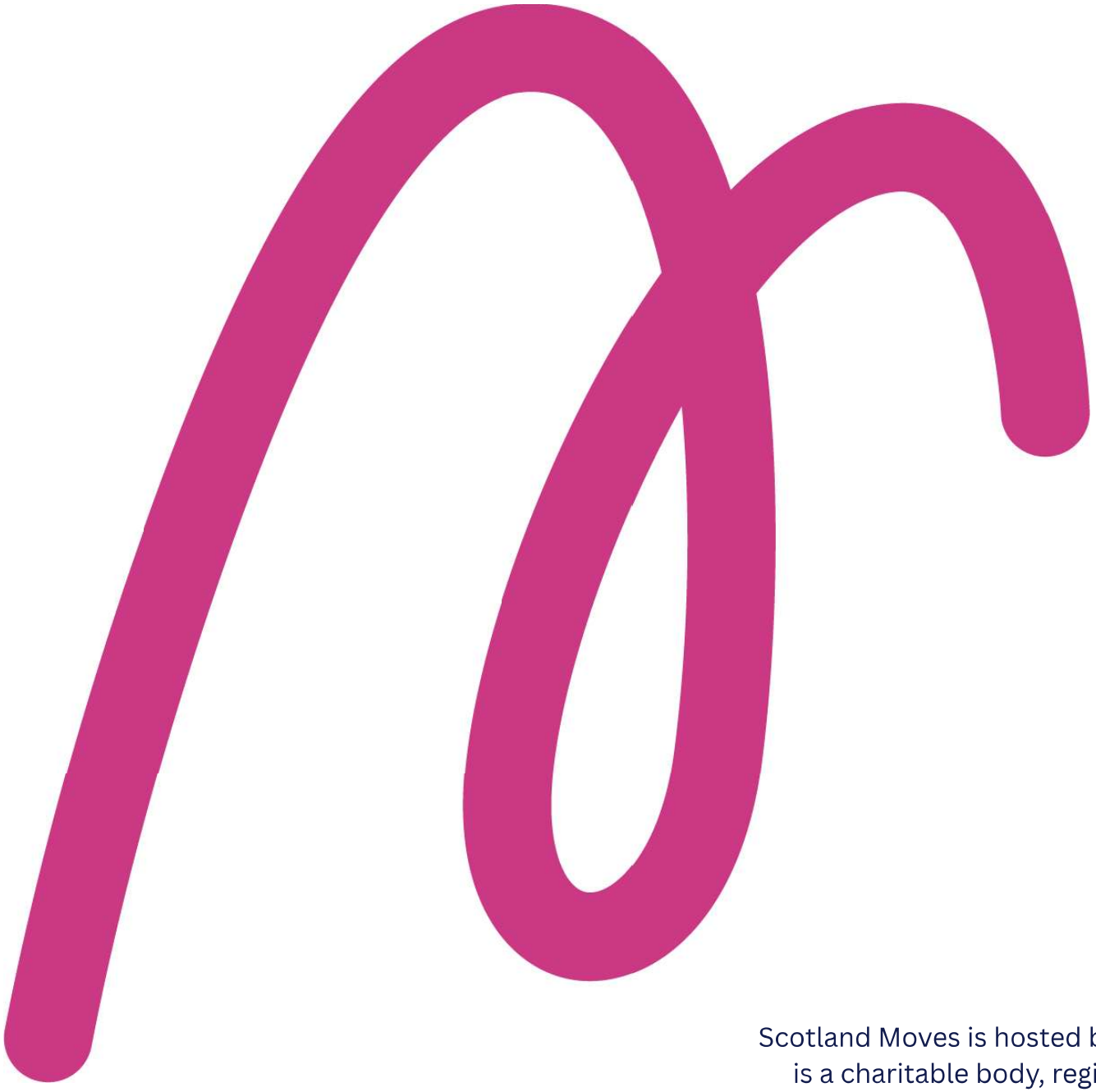

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