

Christmas Day run exposes shocking extent of sedentary behaviour

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Where have all the children gone?

No, not the first line of a verse from Pete Seeger's famous [anti-war anthem](#) but the question I found myself repeatedly asking throughout my Christmas Day run.

It was 11.30am. Presents had been unwrapped; turkeys and trimmings were still roasting in ovens; it was unseasonably warm and there were clear skies.

A smattering of children and young people – ankle-biters to adolescents – would no doubt be at play in the streets, shouting and balling. But no ball games and no shouting. No nothing. Just unnerving silence.

No dads fixing stabilisers onto their child's first bike; no friends chasing each other on their scooters; no young children recreating Bambi on ice as they break in their new roller skates; and no cries of 'look at me! look at me!' as a precursor to some feat of derring-do from a child showing off the extravagant new accessories on their – now 'totally peng' – skateboard.

As I jogged past row upon row of cul de sacs there was more life on the Mary Celeste. Not so much abandoned ship as abandoned streets. Totally bereft of children. Deserted. And my journey had circumnavigated a large town and passed through three villages – a route spanning three postcode boundaries, comprising households from a range of socioeconomic bands.

Consider my run a microcosm of the problems our society is facing. Anecdotal evidence of what we already know: that sedentary behaviour, or sitting disease, has reached pandemic proportions in our children.

To experience such a stark reality check of how lack of exercise has become all-pervasive was a shock. And it was depressing, for we also know that lack of exercise is a major cause of chronic diseases.

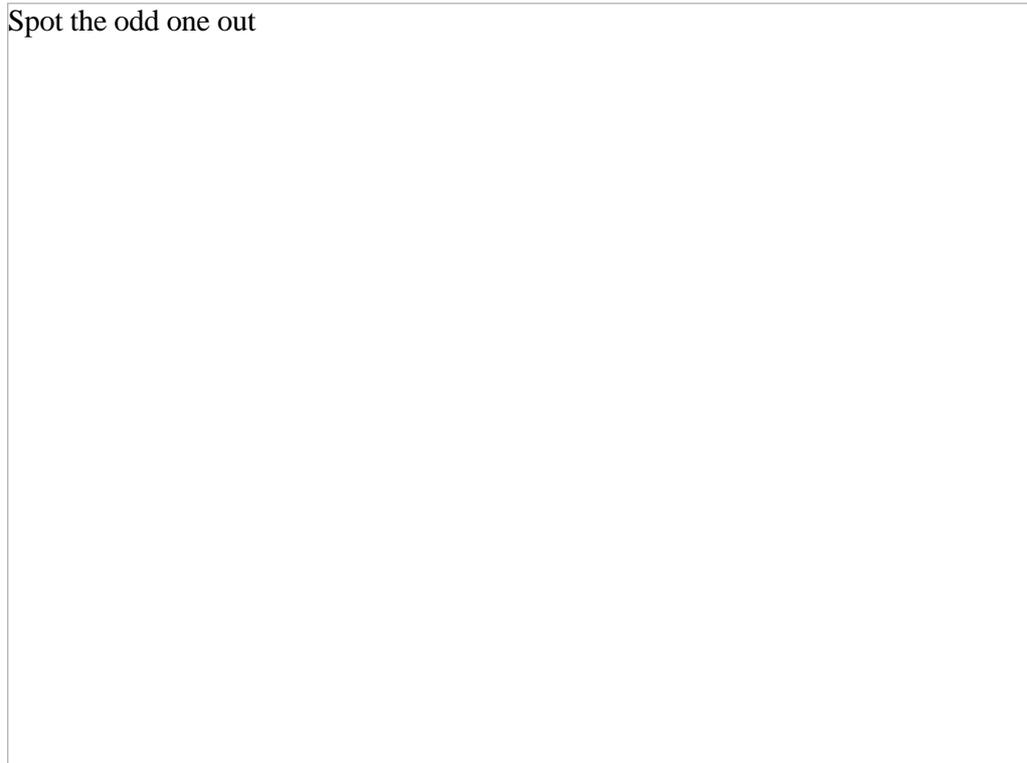
I was reminded of the words of Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson in the Coachwise blog '[We must make children want what children need](#)'. It is the moral duty of parents, teachers and those working in the coaching and physical activity sectors to help children build strong, positive and long-lasting connections with physical activity:

'The generation of children in primary school now are the least active they have been in 30 years and they are the first generation in a really long time who will die before their parents because of being inactive,' said Baroness Grey-Thompson.

We want our kids to get fitter, but they just keep on getting fatter. That's not intended to be flippant. It's a fact.

So, where have all the children gone? I'll tell you. Gone to their game consoles every one (well, an ever-growing percentage at any rate). You may even add: When will they ever learn? When will they ever learn?

Spot the odd one out



Can you spot the odd one out?

Screens make me want to scream

Unlike their presents, our children were all boxed up on December 25th, sat indoors and glued to a television, computer, tablet or smart phone screen – most probably all three by close of play on Christmas Day.

But as parents what can you do? Stamp your feet and scream 'bah humbug' and deprive your little darlings of modern technology or anything containing a USB port?

I admit it. I talk the talk but have failed miserably to walk the walk. I have a teenage daughter who is chained to her iPhone and a teenage son equally addicted to his Play Station who, if you didn't impose time restrictions on him (or rather, discerning use of emotional blackmail) you wouldn't see for a

fortnight... because he'd be playing Fortnite!

I am a child of the 70s. The streets used to be our playground. How times have changed.

Forgive me my solemn narrative bemoaning the radical shift in behaviour, attitudes and habits of modern-day children and my railing against the rise in childhood inactivity levels and obesity.

Actually, scratch that! I am not sorry at all if I have come across as the Grinch who stole Christmas. We should not close our eyes to the seriousness of the situation we find ourselves in.

I just wish for a Yuletide jog when I catch more than a fleeting glimpse of red-faced children rocking around with Christmas glee outside the confines of their home. Shiny happy people having fun. Now that's a more upbeat line from a song. Sadly though, not as fitting as the line I opened with.

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tags : children, physical-activity, active, computers, inactivity, sedentary-behaviour