

# GETTING THE NATION MOVING: THE FESTIVAL EFFECT

› Legacy area: **HEALTH & COMMUNITIES**

› Policy focus: **STRATEGIES**

› **THE EVIDENCE:**

The Olympic and Paralympic Games can be used to encourage people to think about becoming more active

› **THE BIG THREE DEBATES:**

1.

Can the Olympic and Paralympic Games encourage physical activity among those who don't like sport?

2.

How can the Games be promoted as being "beyond sport" when they are an elite sport competition?

3.

Does an emphasis on exercise and trying to persuade people to get healthy put some people off participating?

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### › WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SAY?

Although it is common to hear politicians and Games organisers claim that the Olympic and Paralympic Games can inspire people to take up sport, it is sometimes also claimed that the Games can leave a health and physical activity legacy. In fact, there is emerging evidence that the Games can be used to encourage those people who are not very active in their everyday lives to think about becoming more active through something called a Festival Effect. A Festival Effect emphasises cultural and creative values associated with the Olympic and Paralympic Games, as well as local community values, to create a desire, if not an urge, to be a part of the Games and actively participate in celebratory events. The evidence suggests that a Festival Effect can have two outcomes:

- People who are not interested in sport or formal physical activity can be encouraged to think about becoming more active through informal celebrations and festivals in their own communities.
- People can be encouraged to get active as part of pursuits in which they are already interested, but that they don't think of as being about "exercise" or trying to get healthy.

### › HOW WAS THE EVIDENCE GATHERED?

SPEAR identified evidence suggesting a Festival Effect from a [worldwide review of evidence about developing physical activity and health legacies from the Olympic and Paralympic Games and other sport events](#). The systematic review explored strategies for promoting economic, social, cultural and health legacies, and examined how these strategies could be used to improve health by getting more people physically active. The best 53 studies from around the world since 1990 were analysed with advice from an international expert panel to find out what they collectively said about the potential of the Olympic and Paralympic Games to leave a health and physical activity legacy.

The Department of Health then asked SPEAR to develop an evidence-based guide called [Active Celebration: Using the London 2012 Games to Get the Nation Moving](#). This guide shows how the Olympic and Paralympic values, as well as a broader set of themes and values linked to the London 2012 Games, can be used to help encourage people to become more active.

### › WHO WAS THE AUDIENCE?

The [Department of Health](#) commissioned SPEAR to conduct the worldwide evidence review on health and activity legacies because it wanted to know if it would be worth investing government resources in initiatives designed to use the Olympic and Paralympic Games to promote participation to improve people's health by getting them to become more physically active. Once the review had shown that a Festival Effect could help encourage those who are not active and those who are not interested in formal physical activity and sport to think about becoming more active, the Department of Health asked SPEAR to produce [an evidence-based guide for local policy-makers and practitioners](#) to help them design and implement programmes that could promote active celebrations of the Games.

Although the guide, "[Active Celebration](#)", was commissioned by the Department of Health, its most important audience is those working to promote physical activity and health at a local level. Active Celebration was cascaded down through the regions to local authorities throughout England, and it is now in use in many [towns and counties across the country](#).

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### › THE BIG THREE DEBATES

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Although the evidence shows that a Festival Effect from the Olympic and Paralympic Games can encourage the least active and those not interested in sport and formal physical activity to engage with physical activity and the idea of becoming more active, this does not work if a Festival Effect is linked to messages promoting exercise or trying to persuade people to get healthy. This is because often those who are not active or not interested in sport can be put off physical activity by messages and promotions that they feel are criticising them for being unfit and unhealthy. The Festival Effect is dependent on promoting a sense of celebration, fun and community excitement that is linked to the Olympic and Paralympic Games, but that is bigger than and beyond sport. This can encourage people to become more active through local community celebrations and activities without promoting the activities as being about exercise or improving health.

#### THE BIG THREE DEBATES ABOUT USING THE GAMES TO GET THE NATION MOVING...

- 1 Can the Olympic and Paralympic Games promote informal physical activity among those who are not very active or have negative attitudes to sport and formal physical activity?
- 2 How can the Olympic and Paralympic Games be promoted as being bigger than and beyond sport when it is an elite sport competition?
- 3 Do the messages and promotions emphasising “exercise” and trying to persuade people to get healthy put some people off physical activity?

### › FURTHER RESOURCES AND READING

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- Weed M, Coren E, Fiore J, et al. (2009) A Systematic Review of the Evidence Base for Developing a Physical Activity and Health Legacy from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. <http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/Research/Centres/SPEAR/ResearchProjects/OlympicAndParalympic/OlympicPhysicalActivity.aspx>
- Weed M, Mansfield L & Dowse S. (2009) Active Celebration: Using the London 2012 Games to Get the Nation Moving. <http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/Research/Centres/SPEAR/ResearchProjects/Documents/Active%20Celebrations%20IM.pdf>
- The Department of Health: <http://www.dh.gov.uk/>
- Active Devon: <http://tinyurl.com/activedevon>

## CREDITS

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