

Fact Sheet

Physical Activity



VicHealth

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The benefits of being physically active are numerous and well documented

- Physical inactivity has been estimated to have accounted for 6.6% of the burden of disease and injury in Australia and rates second only to tobacco smoking.¹
- Regular physical activity reduces cardiovascular risk by decreasing levels of overweight, high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes, all cardiovascular risk factors. It also helps protect against some forms of cancer, reduces the likelihood of osteoporosis and improves mental wellbeing.¹
- 54% of Australian adults are not doing enough physical activity to achieve health benefits.¹
- 66.7% of Australians reported that they participated in physical activity for exercise, recreation and sport one or more times per week.²
- 43.5% of Australians reported that they participated in physical activity for exercise, recreation and sport three or more times per week – an increase from 37.2% in 2001.²
- 79.7% of Victorians participated in physical activity for exercise, recreation and sport in 2007.²
- 39.3% of Victorian participated in organised physical activities for exercise, recreation and sport in 2007.²
- 22% of males and 18.1% of females aged 15-24 participated in organised activities three times per week or more.²
- In the 12 months prior to April 2006, 63% of children participated in sport outside of school hours. These had been organised by a school, club or association.³ This is a four percent increase in participation since 2000.
- Just under one-third (31%) of children participated in two or more organised sports in this same time period - 37% for boys and 25% for girls³ - children, boys and girls all increased 2% from April 2003.

What is physical activity?

The World Health Organisation defines physical activity as all movements in everyday life, including work, recreation, exercise and sporting activities.⁴

The Australian National Physical Activity Guidelines recommended that the daily requirement of physical activity is 30 minutes of a moderate intensity. However, three 10 minute sessions per day can be just as effective to obtain significant health benefits.⁵

Moderate-intensity activity will cause a slight, but noticeable, increase in your breathing and heart rate, while vigorous implies activity that makes you 'huff and puff'.⁵

The Australian Government has developed Physical Activity Recommendations for Children and Young People. These guidelines recommend that children and young people should participate in at least 60 minutes (and up to several hours) of moderate to vigorous-intensity physical activity every day.⁶

What do we know?

The 2000 National Physical Activity Survey showed that more than half (54%) of Australians aged 18–75 years did not undertake leisure-time physical activity at the levels

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recommended to achieve health benefits.¹

The most inactive adults were aged 30–59 years and the most active were aged 18–29 years, for both males and females. The proportion reporting no leisure time physical activity over the previous week increased with age, from about 1 in 10 aged 18–29 years to 2 in 10 aged 45 years and over.¹

In Victoria, 64.5% of men participated in sufficient regular physical activity to achieve health benefits (that is, 150 minutes or more of at least moderate intensity activity over 5 or more days per week). Participation rates for women were slightly lower at 63.7%.⁷

Between 1997 and 2000 the proportion of Australians who said that they had participated in lower than recommended levels of physical activity rose from 49% to 54%. Indigenous Australians are more likely to report no physical activity in their leisure time. Forty-three percent of those living in non-remote areas reported no leisure-time physical activity compared with 30% of non-indigenous people living in the same area.¹

Globally, 60% of people don't achieve the minimum recommendation of 30 minutes moderate-intensity physical activity daily.⁸ Among adults, 17% are estimated to be inactive whilst nationally, 30.4% of Australian adults have been found to be inactive; with rates slightly higher amongst females (31.2%) than males (29.6%).⁹

Society has changed rapidly over the years, with labour saving devices, technology and passive forms of entertainment contributing to lifestyles that are increasingly sedentary. Increased car ownership has led to increased traffic and greater safety concerns have led to less walking and cycling to school and work.⁴

There is growing evidence to support the link between the built environment and our physical health. Urban growth has seen new suburbs built in a way that promotes car dependency, with heavy arterial roads and few facilities to encourage walking, cycling or playing.¹⁰

The ABS Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities Survey revealed that 97% of girls and boys aged 5–14 years old reported that the most popular leisure time activity outside of school hours was watching television and videos.³

To encourage more physical activity such as walking, neighbourhoods need to have safe footpaths, good traffic control, lights-controlled pedestrian crossings, visible street signs, good lighting, walkable street networks and major centres of activity that are full of mixed uses such as working, shopping and meeting, so that they become attractive places to be active.¹⁰

Burden of disease

Being physically inactive contributes significantly to the global burden of chronic disease. Regular physical activity plays a major part in helping prevent chronic disease along with a healthy diet and not smoking.⁹ In fact; physical activity is ranked second only to tobacco control as the most important factor in disease prevention in Australia.¹¹

Nationally, physical inactivity is responsible for an estimated 8,000 deaths per year in Australia, and costs the health system at least \$400m in direct health care costs.¹²



breast, colon and rectal cancers and diabetes mellitus, and about 22% of ischaemic heart disease.¹

Benefits of physical activity

Regular physical activity decreases the risk of cardiovascular disease, particularly coronary heart disease, with studies showing that you are twice as likely to have a heart attack if you don't take part in moderate to intense physical activity.¹

Physical activity lowers blood pressure and decreases the chance of developing Type 2 diabetes. It raises the levels of good cholesterol (HDL) and can be protective against some forms of cancer. Being physically active can also improve mental wellbeing by reducing feelings of stress, anxiety and depression.² This has been demonstrated through showing that physical activity can reduce the duration and intensity of clinical depression.¹⁴

Weight bearing exercises such as walking, running and weight training strengthen the musculoskeletal system, which can decrease the likelihood of developing osteoporosis and, in the elderly especially, lessen the risk of having a fall.¹

People who participate in sports or other types of physical activity at an early age, and especially during adolescence, are much more likely to be physically active adults.⁸

What can we do?

There are four main areas in people's lives where there is the potential to increase the levels of physical activity: at work (especially if there is a component of manual labour); as a form of transport (for example walking or cycling to work or school); at home (domestic duties such as housework, gardening, maintenance) and during leisure time (participating in sports or active recreational activities).



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