

Sports and physical activity facts

According to recent research, physical activity levels for Australians are declining, particularly among those aged 30-44 years. Across all age groups, around 15 per cent live sedentary lives. Just over half of all Australians exercise enough to gain the health benefits of increased fitness, reduced body fat and lowered risk of obesity-related disorders such as coronary heart disease. Sport and Recreation Victoria report that swimming, fishing and cycling are the fastest growing physical activities in Australia.

Activity patterns of Australians

In 1999, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Department of Health and Aged Care funded a survey into the physical activity patterns of Australian adults. The 2,500 respondents were aged 18-75 years and distributed proportionately across the various States and Territories. Statistics on sports and physical activity include:

- Around 57 per cent of Australians perform enough exercise to gain health benefits.
- Walking is the most common physical activity.
- Gardening is the second most popular physical activity.
- Thirty-five per cent walked at least five times during the previous week.
- Nine per cent engaged in high-intensity physical activity at least five times during the previous week.
- Five per cent engaged in moderate-intensity physical activity at least five times during the previous week.
- Older adults are more likely to participate in moderate-intensity physical activity.
- Men aged 18-29 years are more likely to participate in high-intensity physical activity.

Organised sports

Organised sports are growing in popularity. The Australian Bureau of Statistics found that over four million Australians played sport in 1998-99, which is a 12 per cent increase since 1996-97.

Popular activities for adults

According to Sport and Recreation Victoria, the most popular sports and activities for Victorian adults include:

- Walking
- Swimming
- Aerobics
- Golf
- Tennis
- Cycling
- Fishing
- Running
- Netball
- Billiards or snooker.

Popular activities for children

According to a recent Smartplay survey of around 5,000 children, the most popular sports and activities for young people include:

- **Girls** - basketball, walking, netball, soccer, bike riding
- **Boys** - basketball, walking, soccer, Australian rules football, bike riding
- **Other popular activities for both girls and boys** - bush walking, kite flying, rollerblading, hand ball, tennis.

Couch potatoes

According to the *Physical Activity Patterns of Australian Adults* survey, around 15 per cent of Australians don't engage in any leisure-time physical activity at all. The older you are, the more likely you'll be living a sedentary lifestyle. People with less than 12 years education are more likely to be sedentary (20 per cent) than those who have tertiary qualifications (11 per cent).

The benefits of regular exercise

Exercising a few times every week offers a range of health benefits, including:

- Strengthened heart and cardiovascular system
- Increased flexibility
- Improved joint mobility
- Increased muscle strength
- Stronger bones
- Improved stamina
- Lowered blood cholesterol levels
- Reduced blood pressure
- Loss of excess body fat
- Reduced risk of various diseases, including heart disease
- Lower incidence of depression
- Reduced stress levels.

See your doctor

If you are over 40, have a pre-existing medical condition or haven't exercised for a long time, consult with your doctor before you start a new exercise program.

Physical Activity Australia Infoline

The Physical Activity Australia Infoline offers one-on-one information and advice to callers on how to live a physically active lifestyle. Information includes:

- Activity levels for health and fitness
- Suggestions on appropriate sports and activities
- Referrals to other appropriate organisations, such as health services.

Where to get help

- Your doctor

Things to remember

- Just over half of all Australians exercise enough to gain health benefits.
- Walking is the most popular physical activity.
- Around 15 per cent of Australians live sedentary lives.
- If you are over 40, have a pre-existing medical condition or haven't exercised for a long time, see your doctor before you start on any new exercise program.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

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