

Sports and physical activity and our health

Summary

- Australians of all ages are not doing enough physical activity for optimal health.
- Over a third of the total burden of disease experienced by Australians could be prevented by tackling modifiable risk factors such as increasing your level of physical activity.
- The sedentary nature of our lifestyle can also lead to poorer health outcomes – around 90% of Australian children have 10 hours or more screen time each week.
- National guidelines recommend Australian adults do 2 ½–5 hours of moderate intensity physical activity, or 1 ¼ to 2 ½ hours of vigorous intensity physical activity each week.
- It is also recommended that adults do muscle strengthening activities on at least two days per week.

Australians' physical activity levels are low. Physical inactivity can also place a burden on the health system, and lead to premature death or disability from injuries such as falls. It is estimated to cost the Australian economy around \$13 billion each year.

Research suggests over a third of the total burden of disease experienced by Australians may be prevented by modifying lifestyle risk factors such as increasing your level of physical activity.

If we are active, not only are we likely to reduce body fat, but reduce our risk of **obesity**, **type 2 diabetes**, cardiovascular disease (CVD) and some cancers. Our overall mental health and wellbeing is also likely to improve.

The sedentary nature of our lifestyle can also lead to poorer health outcomes. Many of us are sitting or lying down for long periods such as spending time in front of a computer at work or driving to work or school. Also, a lot of our downtime is spent on electronic devices scrolling through social media, bingeing on our favourite programs or playing games. A recent survey found around 90% of Australian children have 10 hours or more screen time each week.

Recommended physical activity

Australians of all ages are not doing enough **physical activity for optimal health**. **Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines** recommend being active on most, if not all, days. It is also important to include **muscle strengthening and toning** (such as resistance training) as part of your routine:

Age group	Physical activity	Muscle strengthening
Adults (18-64 years)	150-300 minutes (2 ½ to 5 hours) of moderate intensity physical activity Or 75-150 minutes (1 ¼ to 2 ½ hours) of vigorous intensity physical activity, Or an equivalent combination of both each week	At least 2 days each week
Adults (65 years and over)	At least 30 minutes of physical activity on most, preferably all days.	Choose from different physical activities that incorporate fitness, strength, balance and flexibility.

Children and young people (5-17 years)	At least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity each day. And Several hours of light physical activity (such as going on a leisurely walk or standing up painting at an easel.)	At least 3 days each week.
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Physical activity patterns of Australians

Although mostly preventable, over half of all Australian adults and a quarter of Australian children are overweight or **obese**. Many Australians have unhealthy eating habits, spend too much time sitting or lying down, use screen time as leisure and are not doing enough physical activity.

Research by AusPlay and the Australian Bureau of Statistic's National Health Survey on the recommended **guidelines for physical activity and sedentary behaviour** show:

Adults:

- Around one fifth of Australian adults (18-64 years) meet the recommended guidelines – moderate to vigorous **intensity** physical activity and muscle strengthening and toning.
- More than two thirds of adults do no strength-based activities.
- Physical activity decreases with age – around a quarter of people over 65 years were physically active for 30 minutes, 5 days each week.
- People living in disadvantaged areas are less likely to exercise and to meet the recommended guidelines.

Teenagers:

- Less than 1 in 50 (1.9%) 15–17-year-olds meet the recommended guidelines.
- 1 in 10 (10.3%) young people (15-17 years) exercised 60 minutes each day.
- Young males (15-17-year-olds) were nearly three times more likely than young females to engage in 60 minutes of exercise every day and almost 2 ½ times more likely to do muscle strengthening activities 3 days or more.
- Less than a quarter of teenagers (13-17 years) meet the recommended limit of 2 hours each day for sedentary screen-based behaviour.

Children:

- Just over a quarter of children (5-12 years) meet the recommended guidelines.
- Only 35% of children meet the recommended sedentary screen time limit of 2 hours each day – boys are less likely to meet this guideline.
- Only 1 in 4 preschoolers (2-5 years) meet the limit for screen-based behaviour of no more than 1 hour each day in a 24-hour period.

Popular adult sport and physical activity

Although we are not doing enough physical activity, the latest AusPlay survey shows 82.5% of Australian adults (over 15 years) did physical activity at least once a week. The most popular adult sports and activities are:

- **walking (recreational)**
- **fitness or gym**
- **running** or athletics
- **swimming**
- **cycling**
- bushwalking
- football or **soccer**
- **yoga**
- **golf**

- **tennis**

Popular children's sport and physical activity

According to the latest participation research, over 60% of Australian children (5-14 years) were involved in organised activities (such as those through an organisation or at a specific venue) at least once a week. Children in this age group are more likely to be involved in sport-related and organised activities than other age groups.

Although rates of participation in physical activity are similar, girls are more likely to participate in non-sport types of activities than boys. Based on the latest AusPlay figures, popular activities for children (5-14 years) by gender include:

Girls (5-14 years)	Boys (5-14 years)
swimming	swimming
dancing (recreational)	soccer
netball	Australian rules football
gymnastics	cricket
soccer	basketball
basketball	tennis
dance sport	athletics (track and field)
athletics (track and field)	rugby league
tennis	gymnastics
hockey	rugby union

After the age of 14, young people are more likely to participate in non-organised physical activity.

Barriers to physical activity

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, over half of all Australian adults lead a sedentary lifestyle. A lot of our time is spent sitting or lounging around due to the nature of our work and the amount of screen time we have.

Although there are many reasons **why people aren't active**, main barriers for adults include:

- don't have enough time
- health condition or injury
- no motivation
- age
- dislike sport or physical activity.

Although 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity is recommended for children's growth and development, only around 12% of children (5-12 years) and 2% of young people (13-17 years) meet the guidelines for physical activity and sedentary behaviour.

Main barriers for children include:

- not having enough time

- don't enjoy physical activity
- limited budget
- no access to transport.

Physical inactivity increases with age – people over 65 are more unlikely to be physically active.

Across all age groups (18-65+), women are less likely to be physically active than men.

Benefits of regular physical activity

Being active regularly, offers a range of health benefits:

- Increases flexibility and movement and improves joint mobility.
- Improves co-ordination, movement and balance – helps to reduce the **risk of falls** and injury.
- Strengthens bones, muscles and joints – lowers risk of developing osteoporosis or joint problems (such as **arthritis**).
- Helps to stabilise **blood pressure**, blood sugar and cholesterol levels.
- Helps to **maintain your weight** – reduces body fat.
- Reduces risk of various diseases – including cardiovascular disease (CVD) and some cancers.
- Helps to prevent and manage mental health conditions (such as **depression**) and lowers **stress** and **anxiety**.
- Lowers the risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease (such as heart disease and stroke).
- Improves our state of mind – boosts mood, energy levels, concentration and confidence.
- Helps us relax and sleep better.
- Assists in managing some health conditions (such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes).
- Aids rehabilitation after surgery, injury or illness, especially when there have been long periods of bed rest.
- Can give you an opportunity to meet people and have fun.

Tips to get physically active

Here's some ideas to build physical activity into your day:

- Change your mindset – **if you are busy**, think of movement as an opportunity, not an inconvenience. For example, try to walk or cycle instead of using the car, or take the stairs instead of using the lift.
- If you can't **choose a physical activity** – do something you enjoyed as a child.
- **Exercise with a friend** or family members.
- Doing any physical activity is better than doing none. If you currently do no physical activity, start by doing some, and gradually build up to the recommended amount.
- Set goals to keep focused and motivated.
- Be active on most, preferably all, days every week.
- If you are finding it difficult to make time, look for ways to be active throughout the day – don't make excuses for housework – vacuuming, **gardening** or washing the car can burn kilojoules!
- Minimise the amount of time you spend sitting for long periods – break it up as much as you can.
- Research your options – you may like to **join a health or fitness centre** or **get help from a personal trainer**
- **Get help to draw up an exercise program** tailored to suit your needs and fitness level.
- **Try not to make excuses** – you may feel flat before you start, but will have more energy when you finish.
- Limit screen time for entertainment to no more than – children (2-5 years) = 1 hour each day in a 24-hour period. Children and teenagers (5-17 years) and adults = 2 hours each day.
- Parents or carers – encourage children to have a positive experience when using screen-based devices. Screen time can be healthy if it is balanced throughout the day with physical activities, socialising and creative play.

Before starting a new exercise program

If you are over 45 (men) or over 55 (women), have a pre-existing medical condition or have not exercised for a long time, consult your doctor before you start a new exercise program.

Pre-exercise screening is used to identify people with medical conditions that may put them at a higher risk of experiencing a health problem during physical activity. It is a 'safety net' to help decide if the potential benefits of exercise outweigh the risks for you.

Where to get help

- Your **GP (doctor)** or other health professional
- Your local gym, sports club
- Your local council
- **Exercise physiologist**
- **Physiotherapist**
- **Fitness Australia** Tel. **1300 211 311**
- **Sport and Recreation Victoria**
- **Vicsport**

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