
Sports and physical activity

Summary

- Around 62 per cent of Australians adults do not meet the recommended physical activity guidelines.
 - Walking is the most popular physical activity and 30 minutes every day provides significant health benefits.
 - If you are over 40, have a pre-existing medical condition or have not exercised for a long time, see your doctor before you start a new exercise program.
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According to recent research, physical activity levels for Australians are declining. This is partly due to the sedentary nature of many forms of work and leisure activities, such as watching television or using computers, as well as changes in transportation.

Many Australians are not active enough to gain the health benefits of increased fitness, including reduced body fat, and risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes and coronary heart disease. In 2006–07, the estimated direct healthcare costs due to physical inactivity were almost \$1.5 billion.

Activity patterns of Australians

In 2011, the Australian Bureau of Statistics released a snapshot of the physical activity patterns of Australian adults, based on an analysis of data from the 2007–08 National Health Survey.

The snapshot showed that:

- Around 62 per cent of Australians adults did not meet the recommended physical activity guidelines.
- A higher proportion of women than men were not meeting the guidelines (64 per cent and 60 per cent respectively).
- The proportion of people who did not meet the guidelines was highest in older adults – those aged 75 years and over (76 per cent).
- Almost 40 per cent of adults did no exercise during the previous week.
- Women and older Australian adults were more likely to walk for exercise than men, while men were more likely to undertake moderate and vigorous exercise.
- Adults with a higher education level (those who had completed year 12 (or equivalent), or had higher education qualifications), were more likely to meet the physical activity guidelines than those who had a lower education level (those who had completed year 11 or lower and had no post-school qualifications).

Physical activity and organised sports

In 2009–2010, around a quarter of Australians aged 15 years and over were involved in organised sports and physical activity. Men were more likely to be involved in organised sports than women (29 per cent versus 24 per cent). Participation decreased with age.

Popular sports and activities for adults

The most popular sports and activities for Australians adults are:

- walking
 - aerobics, fitness or gym activities
 - swimming or diving
 - cycling
 - jogging or running
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- golf
- tennis
- netball
- bushwalking
- soccer.

Popular sports and activities for children

According to *Australian Bureau of Statistics* data, popular sports for children aged 5-14 include:

- for girls – dancing, swimming/diving, netball, gymnastics, basketball, soccer (outdoor), tennis, martial arts, athletics (track and field), horse riding (equestrian and polo), hockey
- for boys – soccer (outdoor), swimming/diving, Australian Rules football, basketball, cricket (outdoor), tennis, martial arts, Rugby League, Rugby Union. dancing, athletics (track and field).

Other popular activities for both girls and boys include bike riding, rollerblading and skateboarding.

Physical inactivity

According to *Physical Activity in Australia* (2011), the most common level of exercise reported was 'sedentary' (40%). Physical inactivity increased with age, as 83 per cent of people aged 75 and over reported doing no exercise at all. In general, women were more likely to be physically inactive than men.

The benefits of regular physical activity

Being active for some time, 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.

Physical activity recommendations for adults include:

- 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.
- Be as active as possible in as many ways as you can throughout the day.
- Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity (such as brisk walking) on most (preferably all) days. The 30 minutes does not have to be continuous. Combine short 10 to 15 minute sessions throughout the day instead.

Physical activity recommendations for children include:

- Children (aged five to 18 years) should accumulate at least 60 minutes and up to several hours of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day.
- Screen time (television, videos and computer games) for entertainment should be limited to two hours a day.

Before starting a new exercise program

If you are over 40, 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 doctor

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

Deakin University - School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences

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