Physical activity patterns of Australian adults
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Physical activity patterns of Australian adults
Results of the 1999 National Physical Activity Survey

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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACSM</td>
<td>American College of Sports Medicine</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIHW</td>
<td>Australian Institute of Health and Welfare</td>
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<td>BMI</td>
<td>body mass index</td>
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<tr>
<td>CATI</td>
<td>Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview</td>
</tr>
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<td>CI</td>
<td>confidence interval</td>
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<tr>
<td>CVD</td>
<td>cardiovascular disease</td>
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<tr>
<td>DHAC</td>
<td>Department of Health and Aged Care</td>
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<td>DHFS</td>
<td>Department of Health and Family Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>HDL</td>
<td>high-density lipoprotein</td>
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<tr>
<td>HSC</td>
<td>Higher School Certificate</td>
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<tr>
<td>HVRF</td>
<td>Hunter Valley Research Foundation</td>
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<td>ICC</td>
<td>intra-class correlation</td>
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<td>MET</td>
<td>metabolic equivalent</td>
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Preface

Physical inactivity is recognised as one of the most important population health risk factors. Its role as a risk factor is at least as significant as hypertension or high cholesterol in contributing to cardiovascular disease, one of Australia’s major killers. In addition, physical activity protects against several cancers, reduces the risk of diabetes, improves mental health and may reduce the risk of falls and injuries in the elderly.

Overall, physical inactivity ranks second only to tobacco smoking in importance for the burden of disease and disability from all-causes in Australia (Mathers et al. 1999).

Participation in regular physical activity has important health and social benefits. In fact, physical activity can play a part as a preventive factor in five of the six National Health Priority Areas—cardiovascular disease, cancer control, mental health, diabetes mellitus and injury prevention and control.

Physical Activity Patterns of Australian Adults, released on the eve of the 2000 Sydney Olympics, provides much-needed information on national physical activity levels of Australian adults, as well as providing an indication of the impact of the Active Australia initiative. The Olympics is a time to focus on elite athletes and their performances, but also to think about the performance of Australia more broadly as an active nation. This report documents current patterns of physical activity participation among Australian adults in 1999 and provides information on trends from 1997.

In order to assess current patterns of physical activity and the impact of the Active Australia campaign, a survey of 3,841 people was conducted during November 1999. The information presented in this report includes the most up-to-date data on physical activity levels and attitudes among Australians adults.

The 1999 National Physical Activity Survey was jointly funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. It follows an earlier comparable survey funded under the auspices of Active Australia in November 1997. The report is a valuable resource for researchers and those interested in public health policy and health promotion.

Dr Richard Madden
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Summary

This report presents results from a national physical activity survey of Australian adults conducted in November and December 1999. It covers current (1999) activity patterns and recent national trends. This report represents the most up-to-date information using recognised measures and methods to ensure comparable information on trends in physical activity.

A large and growing proportion of Australians see the health benefits of physical activity

- 88% of people believe that their health could be improved by being generally more active.
- 92% of people believe that health could be improved by participation in 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each day.
- There was an increase in overall knowledge of the health benefits of physical activity and awareness of physical activity messages between 1997 and 1999.
- 42% of people recognised the *Active Australia* tagline ‘Exercise—you only have to take it regularly, not seriously’.
- Recall of ‘Rusty’, the 1999 International Year of Older People physical activity campaign, was 24% in those aged 60–75 years.

However, participation is declining...

- The average number of times each week people participated in walking, moderate and vigorous leisure-time physical activity declined between 1997 and 1999.
- The average amount of time people spent each week in physical activity declined between 1997 and 1999.
- This finding held for participation in physical activity done in the ‘previous week’ and over a ‘usual’ week.

The proportion of physically inactive people is increasing...

- The proportion of physically inactive Australians increased between 1997 and 1999 (13% to 15% respectively).
- This increase in physical inactivity was greatest for those people aged 30–44 years (12% to 17%), and among those people with tertiary levels of education (6% to 11%).

And the percentage of those achieving ‘sufficient’ levels of physical activity for a health benefit is declining.

- Between 1997 and 1999 there was a decline in the proportion of Australians participating in ‘sufficient’ physical activity to provide a health benefit (62% to 57%).
- The decline was seen for both men (63% to 60%) and women (61% to 54%).
- The decline was greatest for people aged 30–44 years (64% to 54%).
- The proportion of people aged 60–75 years participating in ‘sufficient’ levels of activity did not change between 1997 and 1999.
Who achieved ‘sufficient’ levels of physical activity in 1999?

- Participation at a ‘sufficient’ activity level for a health benefit was greatest among 18–29-year-olds (69%) and lowest among 45–59-year-olds (50%).
- Men (60%) were more likely than women (54%) to participate at ‘sufficient’ levels.
- For men, participation at a ‘sufficient’ activity level was greatest for those aged 18–29 years (74%) and lowest among those aged 45–59 years (50%).
- Among women, participation at a ‘sufficient’ activity level decreased with age from 64% in those aged 18–29 years to 48% in those 60–75 years of age.
- Participation at a ‘sufficient’ activity level increased with educational attainment.

Who is more likely to participate in physical activity?

- Obese Australian adults were 50% less likely than other Australian adults to reach a ‘sufficient’ level of physical activity compared with those of healthy weight.
- Older Australians were less likely to participate in ‘sufficient’ physical activity than younger people.
- Women were 20% less likely to achieve ‘sufficient’ physical activity compared with men.
- People with at least one child at home were 20% less likely to be ‘sufficiently’ active than those without.
- People who did not recall the Active Australia slogan ‘Exercise—you only have to take it regularly, not seriously’ were 19% less likely to achieve ‘sufficient’ levels of physical activity than people who did recall it.

Do Australians intend to increase their participation?

- In 1999, one-third of Australian adults said that they intended to become more physically active in the next month and 29% said that they were intending to become more physically active in the next six months.
- Intentions to become more physically active were greater for women than for men, and decreased with age.