

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.