

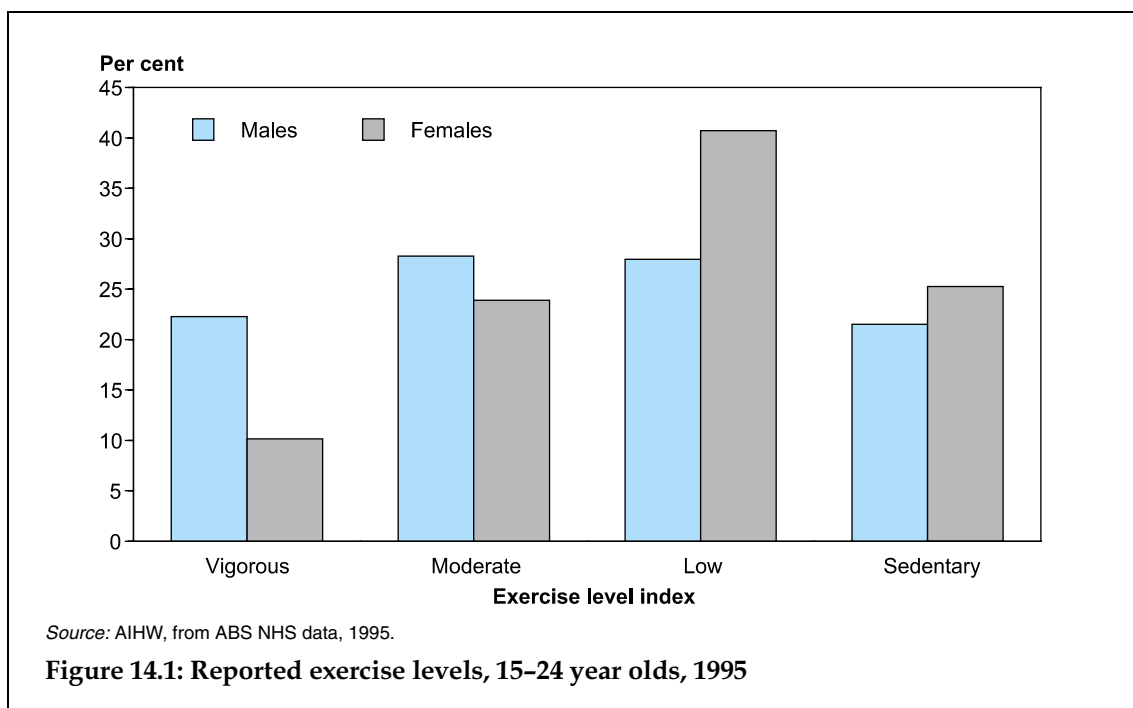
14 Physical activity

The health benefits of physical activity are well documented and it has long been regarded as a necessary part of a healthy lifestyle. Physical activity (which may be planned/structured or incidental) has been shown to reduce the risk of many diseases including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, colon cancer, bone diseases, mental illness and obesity (AIHW 1998).

The data on *exercise levels* presented in this chapter come from the 1995 National Health Survey (NHS). Additional information on young people's participation in *organised sport and physical activities* is also collected by the ABS.

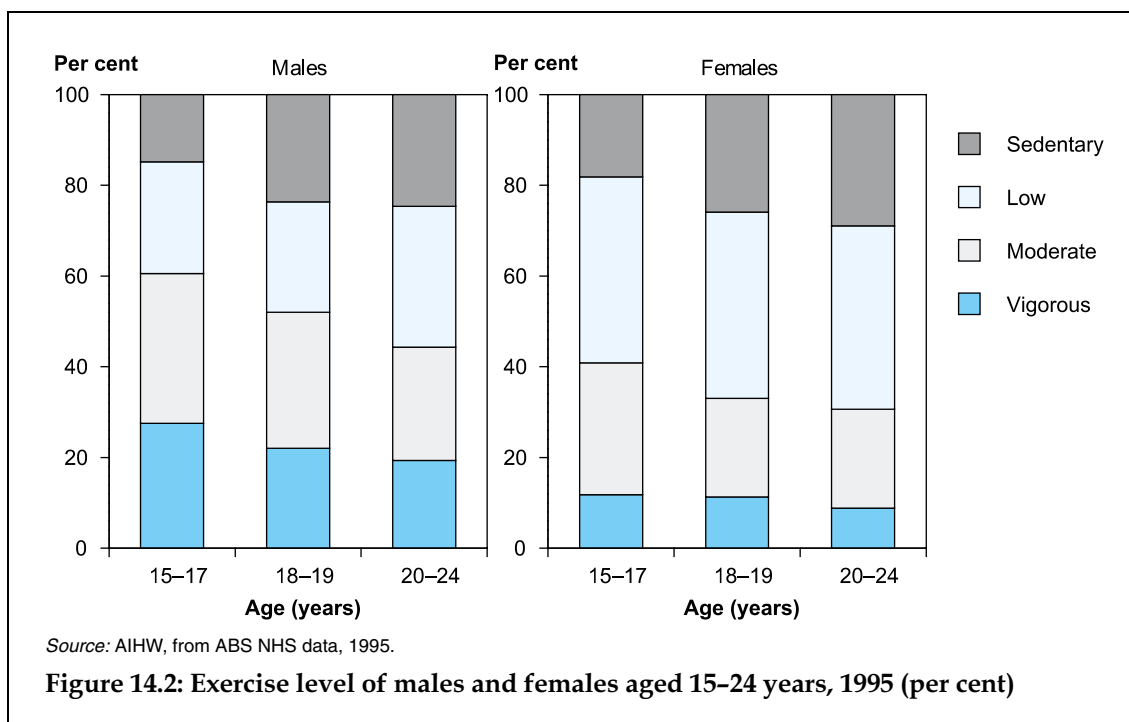
Exercise level

The NHS collects information on exercise for sport and recreation and health fitness purposes only; other activities (such as physical activity at work) are not included. Respondents were asked how many times and for how long in the last 2 weeks they walked or undertook moderate or vigorous exercise. The respondent's exercise level was calculated from this information. The NHS defined 'vigorous' as 'causing perspiration or large increase in heart rate or breathing' and 'moderate' as 'a moderate increase in heart rate or breathing'.



- Figure 14.1 shows that young males were more likely to exercise at higher levels (vigorous and moderate levels) than young females. Young males were more than twice as likely than females to report exercising at vigorous levels. The proportion of males who reported exercising at moderate levels was slightly higher than for females.
- Young females were much more likely to report exercising at low levels than young males. The proportion of females who were classified as 'sedentary' was slightly higher than for males.

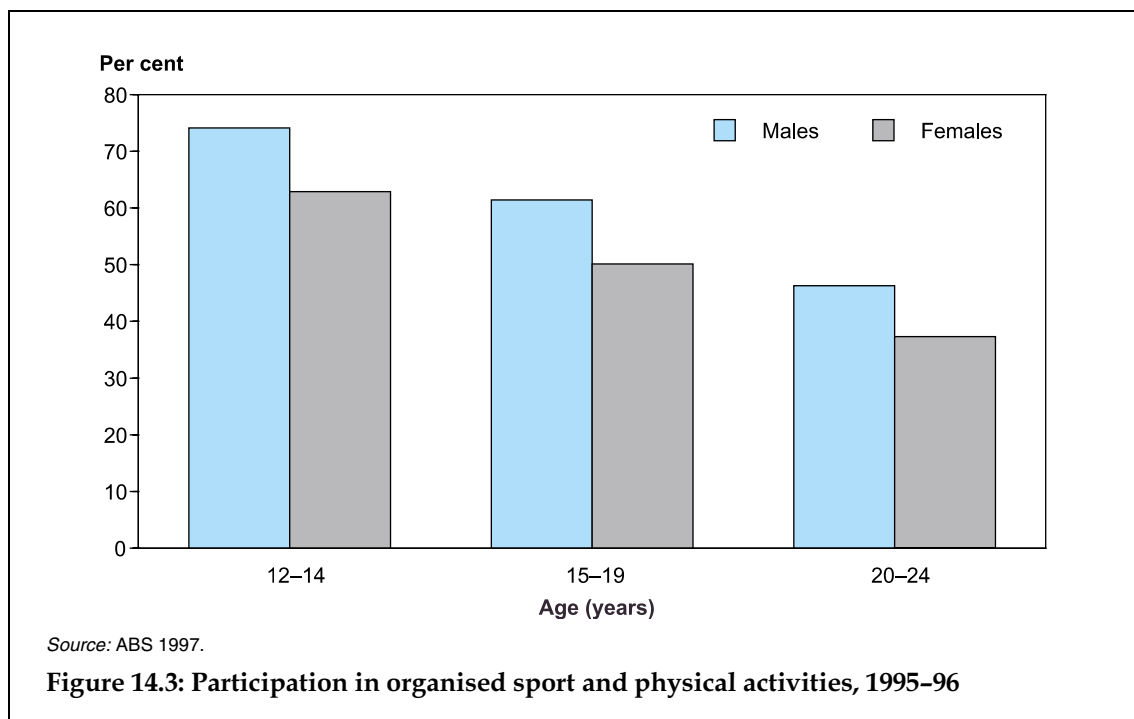
Physical activity



- The proportion of youth who reported exercising for sport or recreational purposes at a vigorous level decreased with age for both males and females. The drop was more marked among males, but the proportion of males exercising at vigorous levels were higher at all ages. For males the proportion declined from 28% of males aged 15-17 years to 19% of males aged 20-24 years. The proportion of females exercising at vigorous levels decreased from 12% of 15-19 year olds to 9% of 20-24 year olds.
- Similarly, the proportion of young people who reported exercising at a moderate level also decreased with age, except for females aged 18-24 years.
- Conversely, the proportion of young people reporting no exercise increased with age, from 15% of males aged 15-17 years to 25% of those aged 20-24 years, and 18% of females aged 15-17 years to 29% of those aged 20-24 years.
- The proportions of young people who reported exercising at low levels were similar across the age groups for each sex, with the exception of an increase among the older males.

Organised activities

The information presented in this section comes from a survey conducted by the ABS in 1995–96, as part of the Population Survey Monitor. Respondents were asked whether they had participated in a sport or physical activity organised by a school, club, organisation or association in the last 12 months. The survey is limited to measuring participation in organised sport and physical activities; other types of sport and physical activities which might have been undertaken outside club environments, such as jogging or walking, are not included. Physical activity during school hours including physical education classes is also excluded.



- In 1995–96, youth participation rates in organised activities declined with age for both males and females. Around 56% of youth aged 15–19 years participated in organised sport and physical activities, compared with 42% of youth aged 20–24 years.
- Young males recorded higher participation rates in organised activities than young females at all ages.

References

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 1998. Australia's health 1998: the sixth biennial health report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. AIHW Cat. No. AUS 10. Canberra: AIHW.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 1997. Participation in sport and physical activities 1995–96. ABS Cat. No. 4177.0. Canberra: ABS.