

3 Interviewer training and survey implementation

This section provides a guide to implementing the Active Australia Survey in the field. First, the procedure used to implement the National Physical Activity Surveys is briefly described. Next, there are some handy hints for users, researchers, interviewers and analysts, highlighting common problems that may arise and suggesting ways to minimise reporting errors. Finally, the eight core questions for assessing physical activity participation are reproduced, along with tips for interviewers.

3.1 The National Physical Activity Survey

The National Physical Activity Survey was conducted in 1997 (often referred to as the Active Australia Baseline Survey), 1999 and 2000 (Bauman et al. 2001; Armstrong et al. 2000; ASC 1998). The three surveys were conducted at exactly the same period of the year (the last two weeks of November and first two weeks of December) to ensure that participation rates were not affected by seasonal conditions. This survey period was also before the summer holiday period, because participation rates during holiday periods may be influenced by increased leisure time. Each year, the survey consisted of the Active Australia core survey questions listed in the previous section, plus some supplementary questions covering demographics, height and weight, recognition and recall of specific physical activity promotional messages and participation in related organised activities such as Active Australia Day.

The survey method was a random sample population telephone survey (using CATI methodology) conducted by the Hunter Valley Research Foundation. The electronic white pages were used to generate a random sample of households, and an adult aged 18–75 years was then randomly selected from within each household. Participation was voluntary. Those who participated were asked a series of questions (lasting about 10 minutes) on their participation in, and knowledge and understanding of physical activity. An example of the CATI coding used in the 1999 survey is presented in Appendix 1. More detailed information regarding survey methodology can be found in Armstrong et al. 2000.

3.2 Handy hints for users, researchers, interviewers and analysts

This section presents some common problems that may arise when implementing the Active Australia Survey and some suggestions for dealing with these problems and minimising reporting errors.

Common difficulties

Difficulties may include:

- ensuring the respondent understands the meaning of the questions
- ensuring that ineligible activities are not included in the respondent's answers
- ensuring that eligible activities are correctly classified (i.e. as walking, vigorous yardwork, other vigorous or other moderate activities)
- ensuring that the answers recorded are meaningful and plausible.

Suggestions to minimise errors

- Adhere to the chosen random sampling methodology. In the National Physical Activity Surveys, the following procedure is used:
 - Randomly select households (from the white pages of the telephone directory).
 - Determine the number of eligible persons in the household.
 - Identify the desired respondent using some random choice method, e.g. next birthday.
 - **Do not** substitute if this person is not available. This may lead to substantial selection bias and invalidate the results of the survey.
 - Use callbacks to speak with the correct person. A minimum of six is suggested.
- Thorough interviewer training is essential. Incorporate examples of the types of answers which may be expected and allow for all interviewers to test the questionnaire as both interviewer and respondent. Also stress the importance of the random sampling method and the need to interview only the chosen person; substitutions will introduce selection bias and affect the extent to which estimates derived from the survey can be generalised.
- Ensure that the types of activities that are eligible are clearly understood. This relates especially to occupational activity. It may be decided that walking as an occupational activity can be included (e.g. postal delivery workers, pedestrian police); however, the need for the activity to be **continuous** in 10-minute intervals must be stressed to both the interviewer and the respondent.
- Make sure that the interviewer is aware of the difference between moderate and vigorous activities and how various activities are classified (e.g. squash would be a vigorous activity but cricket would be a moderate activity). It may be helpful to consider the effect an activity has on breathing or heart rate as a rough guide to its intensity; a moderate activity will make you breathe somewhat harder than normal and slightly increase heart rate, and a vigorous activity will make you breathe much harder than normal and have a greater effect on heart rate. Activities which cannot be classified during the interview should be noted (along with details of time and sessions) for referral to the supervisor.
- Researchers and trainers may find the *Compendium of Physical Activities* useful as a guide to intensity classification (Ainsworth et al. 2000). According to this guide, activities with an intensity of 3–6 METs* are classified as moderate, and those with intensity greater than 6 METs are classified as vigorous.
- Ensure that the hours/minutes sections are correctly recorded, e.g. to record 1 hour of activity, fill in 1 hour **or** 60 minutes but not both.
- Each interviewer should be supplied with paper and pen, and a calculator if necessary, to make notes for the supervisor or to help the respondent calculate total time spent in each activity.
- Make sure that the 'number of times' is always completed, i.e. enter zero (0) rather than leave blank for respondents who do not participate in a particular activity.

* 1 MET = the resting metabolic rate, equivalent to oxygen uptake of 3.5 mL/kg/hr.

- Be alert for logical inconsistencies in the data. For example, a person who reports five sessions of walking must have recorded a total time of at least 50 minutes to satisfy the 'continuously for at least 10 minutes' wording of the question.
- Clarify answers which may seem implausible, e.g. reporting one vigorous activity session and a total time of 4 hours.
- Where a CATI system is being used, notes on the screen relating to the current question may be helpful, e.g. types of eligible activities.
- Limiting data entry fields may be helpful, e.g. limit the hours of activity field from 0 to 14 as per the truncation rules. Answers which, after clarification from the respondent, are still outside the limits should be noted by the interviewer and assessed later by the research team.

3.3 Annotated survey questions for interviewers

In this section, the eight core questions for assessing participation in physical activity are reproduced, annotated with tips to improve data collection and to help answer respondents' queries. No specific instruction is necessary for the five 'awareness' questions except to suggest that, as in the three national surveys, the statements are presented in random order to reduce bias which may result from the order in which the statements are presented.

The next questions are about any physical activities that you may have done in the last week:

1. In the last week, how many times have you walked continuously, for at least 10 minutes, for recreation, exercise or to get to or from places?

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Interviewer: Stress that this must be **continuous** walking, i.e. for at least 10 minutes without stopping.

2. What do you estimate was the total time that you spent walking in this way in the last week?

In hours and/or minutes

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		hours
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Interviewer: If the respondent appears to be having difficulty in totalling the time over the entire week, you could assist by prompting for a time each day and adding them yourself, e.g. 'Did you walk on Monday? How long did you spend walking on Monday? And did you walk on Tuesday? For how long?'

3. In the last week, how many times did you do any vigorous gardening or heavy work around the yard, which made you breathe harder or puff and pant?

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 times

Interviewer: The types of activities which may be included in this section could include heavy digging, tree lopping, landscaping (e.g. pushing a wheelbarrow or moving large rocks), pushing a lawn mower and using a hand saw.

4. What do you estimate was the total time that you spent doing vigorous gardening or heavy work around the yard in the last week?

In hours and/or minutes

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 minutes

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 hours

Interviewer: As for the walking question, if the respondent is having trouble providing a total time, assist them by prompting for a time each day.

The next questions exclude household chores, gardening or yardwork:

5. In the last week, how many times did you do any vigorous physical activity which made you breathe harder or puff and pant? (e.g. jogging, cycling, aerobics, competitive tennis)

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 times

Interviewer: The types of activities which might be reported here, in addition to the above examples, include football (of all types), hockey, squash, cross-country skiing, cross-country hiking (i.e. rough or steep terrain), weight lifting, boxing, rock climbing, basketball, netball, gymnastics, using a rowing machine, martial arts, high-impact and step aerobics.

6. What do you estimate was the total time that you spent doing this vigorous physical activity in the last week?

In hours and/or minutes

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 minutes

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 hours

Interviewer: Again, prompt the respondent for daily times if they are having difficulty calculating a weekly total.

7. In the last week, how many times did you do any other more moderate physical activities that you have not already mentioned? (e.g. gentle swimming, social tennis, golf)

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 times

Interviewer: The types of activities which might be expected, in addition to the above examples, include dancing, badminton, table tennis, horseback riding, canoeing, kayaking, volleyball, cricket, baseball or softball, downhill skiing, cross-training, surfing and windsurfing.

8. What do you estimate was the total time that you spent doing these activities in the last week?

In hours and/or minutes

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 minutes

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 hours

Interviewer: Again, assist the respondent with adding daily times if necessary.