DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Population Research and Outcome Studies

BRIEF REPORT
Number : 2002-16

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ADULTS

In September 2001, a SERCIS population health survey was conducted which sought to determine the level of physical activity of South Australian adults. The survey obtained information on the type and duration of exercise undertaken in the week prior to the survey, in an attempt to determine whether a sufficient amount of physical activity was being undertaken.

METHODS

In all, 3000 adults (18 years and over) in South Australia were interviewed and the overall response rate was 75.2%. The interviews were conducted by telephone using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) technology.

RESULTS

Types of Exercise

Overall, in the week prior to the survey:

- 75.1% of the respondents had walked for more than 10 minutes;
- 43.3% had undertaken vigorous household chores;
- 44.4% had undertaken vigorous gardening;
- 34.6% had undertaken vigorous physical activity;
- 14.8% had undertaken moderate physical activity.

A respondent was defined as sedentary if they had not undertaken any of the above five activities in the past week. Figure 1 shows the prevalence of sedentary behaviour according to the number of activities undertaken.

DEFINITIONS OF SUFFICIENT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The definitions used to define a sufficient level of physical activity were those published in 2000 by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare\(^1\).

Definition 1

- 150 minutes of walking, moderate or vigorous physical activity with vigorous activity weighted by a factor of two to account for its greater intensity.

Definition 2

- 150 minutes of walking, moderate or vigorous physical activity with vigorous activity weighted by a factor of two over at least five separate sessions in a week.

Sufficient Levels of Physical Activity

The level of sufficient physical activity according to each of the definitions was also determined and the results are summarised in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of activity</th>
<th>Definition 1 (%)</th>
<th>Definition 2 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sufficient physical</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient physical</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sedentary</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents who undertook sufficient physical activity according to definition 1 were significantly more likely to:
• be male;
• be aged between 18 and 29 years;
• never have been married;
• currently be working full time;
• have undertaken some form of higher education or trade;
• earn over $60,000;
• describe their health as good, very good or excellent and;
• have a body mass index in the normal range.

Respondents who undertook sufficient physical activity according to definition 2 were significantly more likely to:
• be male;
• be aged between 18 and 29 years;
• never have been married;
• have a degree or higher;
• earn over $60,000;
• not receive a pension;
• describe their health as good, very good or excellent and;
• have a body mass index in the normal or underweight ranges.

Level of physical activity

Respondents (n=3000) were asked to indicate their perception of how physically active they had been over the preceding week.

The responses are summarised in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of activity</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very active</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>49.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very active</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all active</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Level of physical activity in the previous week

Reasons for not being more physically active

All respondents were asked to give reasons as to why they could not be more physically active.

The most common response was “I haven’t got time” (44.6%). Other frequent responses were: “My health is not good enough” (21.2%) and “Active enough” (17.1%).

Factors that would assist respondents in being more physically active

Respondents (n=3000) were asked to nominate the factors that would assist them to be more physically active. The top five responses are summarised in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Factors that would assist respondents to be more physically active

I Implications

There remains a proportion of South Australians who do not undertake a sufficient level of activity to confer a health benefit. The level of activity needs to be increased in an attempt to improve fitness and reduce the possible incidence of chronic disease.

INFORMATION

For further information about the results from the survey please visit the web site at: http://www.dh.sa.gov.au/pehs/cpse/sercis-publications.html or contact Tiffany Gill on 08 8226 0739 or email tiffany.gill@health.sa.gov.au.au