

Northern Ireland Health and Social Wellbeing Survey 2001

Bulletin number 3

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Physical Activity Bulletin

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Commissioned by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety



This is the third in a series of bulletins produced from the Northern Ireland Health and Social Wellbeing Survey 2001.

This bulletin presents some of the key findings relating to physical activity. The bulletin focuses on 7 main areas: Walking, current physical activity levels, sedentary levels, recommended physical activity levels, motivations to take regular physical activity, barriers to regular physical activity and intentions regarding regular physical activity.

Walking

Recent health promotion campaigns have focused on walking as a way to increase physical activity levels. Respondents were asked about the amount they had walked in the previous 4 weeks

One third (32%) of respondents had walked between 1 and 2 miles at least once a week in the previous 4 weeks, and 21% had walked 2 miles or more at least once a week in the previous 4 weeks.

Overall, less than a half of respondents (40%) had walked more than a mile at least once a week in the previous 4 weeks.

Age and sex

The number of adults who had not walked two miles or more increased with age from over half (54%) of those aged 16-24 to 89% of those aged 75 and over.

Overall, there was no difference in the proportion of men and women who had walked a mile or more in the previous 4 weeks. However, among those aged 65 and over, men were more likely than women to walk 2 miles or more at least once a week.

Socio economic group (SEG)

Respondents in the unskilled SEG were less likely to have taken walks of 2 miles or more in the previous 4 weeks (25%), compared with those in the professional/ managerial SEG (47%).

All physical activities, including those taken in the course of work, leisure or around the home were included in the measurement of current physical activity levels.

In addition to this bulletin, tables of all the key areas analysed by all the classificatory variables along with the survey questions and a technical supplement are available on-line. Information on how to access these is provided at the end of this bulletin.

Employment status

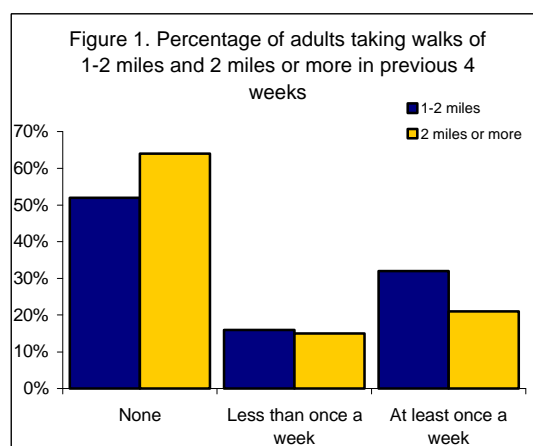
The economically inactive were less likely to have taken any walks of 2 miles or more in the previous 4 weeks than those in employment (27% compared with 45%).

General health

Respondents who said their general health was not good were less likely to have taken any walks of 2 miles or more in the previous 4 weeks (15%) compared with those people who said their health had been good (46%) or fairly good (32%).

Cigarette smoking

Cigarette smokers were less likely to have taken walks of 2 miles or more (32%) than ex smokers (38%) or people who have never smoked cigarettes (38%).



Current physical activity levels

Part of the DHSSPSNI regional strategy (1997-2002) was to reduce the proportion of people that are sedentary and increase the proportion who achieve the recommended activity levels.

Within the definitions used in this survey, a quarter (25%) of all adults aged 16 and above can be classed as physically inactive or sedentary. That is, they had not taken any activity of at least a moderate level, lasting 20 minutes, on one or more occasion in the previous 7 days.

28% of all adults had taken the recommended level of physical activity of at least 30 minutes per day on 5 days a week.

Almost a half (47%) of all adults had taken an intermediate level of physical activity in the previous 7 days, i.e. above the sedentary level, but not enough to meet recommended levels.

Sedentary levels

Age and sex

The elderly were considerably more likely to be sedentary than the young. 63% of people aged 75 and over were sedentary in comparison to only 11% of 16-24 year olds.

Approximately a quarter of both men (24%) and women (25%) were sedentary.

Socio economic group (SEG)

Sedentary levels were highest in the unskilled SEG (37%) and lowest in the professional/ managerial and skilled non-manual SEGs (17%).

Employment status

Respondents who were economically inactive were almost twice as likely to be sedentary (40%) as those who were unemployed (23%) and about four times as likely as those in employment (11%).

Limiting long standing illness

People with a limiting long standing illness were over 4 times as likely to be sedentary as those people without (55% compared with 13%).

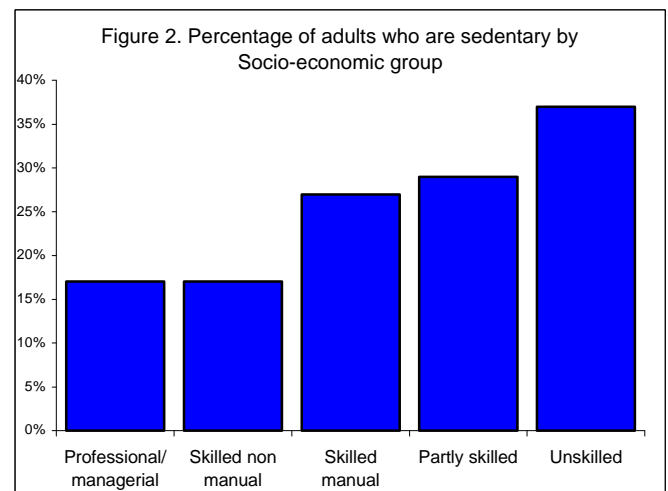
Cigarette smoking and drinking

Current smokers were no more likely to be sedentary (25%) than those who had never smoked (24%) or had given up smoking (25%).

Respondents who drank above the recommended weekly limits were less likely to be sedentary (16%) than those who drank within the recommended levels (21%), or who had never drunk (37%).

Perception of own weight

Respondents who said they weigh a lot more than they should or a lot less were more likely to be sedentary (32% and 52% respectively) than those who said they weigh about the right amount (22%).



Recommended physical activity levels

Age and sex

Men were more likely than women to have taken at least the recommended level of physical activity, 30% and 26% respectively.

There was no significant difference in the proportion of men and women taking recommended levels across most age groups, with the exception of the 16-24 and 75+ age groups, in which men were more likely than women to have taken the recommended level of physical activity.

Socio economic group

There was no significant difference in the proportions taking recommended levels of physical activity across the different socio economic groups.

Employment status

Those respondents in employment were more likely to have taken the recommended level of physical activity (36%) than those who were unemployed (26%) and almost twice as likely as those who were economically inactive (19%).

Limiting long standing illness

13% of respondents who said they have a limiting long-standing illness had taken the recommended level of physical activity in the previous 7 days.

Recommended physical activity levels (continued)

Cigarette smoking and drinking

31% of respondents who smoked cigarettes on a daily basis took the recommended level of physical activity compared with 26% of respondents who had never smoked cigarettes. Respondents who drank within the recommended levels or above these levels were more likely to have taken the recommended levels of physical activity, 30% and 32% respectively, compared with ex drinkers (19%) and those people who had never drank (19%).

Perception of own weight

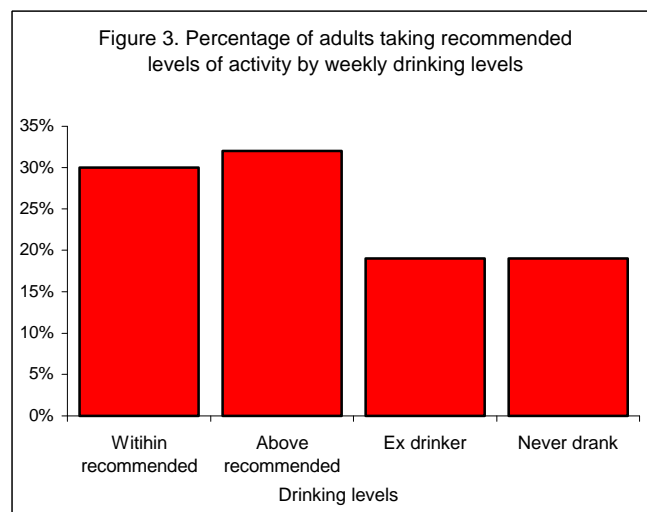
Respondents who said they weigh just about the right amount were more likely to have taken above the recommended level of physical activity (30%) compared with those who weigh a lot more than they should (23%) or a lot less (17%).

Comparisons with intermediate levels of physical activity

The number of adults taking intermediate or recommended levels of physical activity reduced with age. However, intermediate activity levels tended to decline steadily from 58% of 16-24 year olds to 27% of those aged 75 and over, while the proportion with recommended activity levels only started to decline after the age of 45-54, from 32% to 10%. Intermediate activity levels reduced from a half (55%) of the professional/ managerial SEG to a third (33%) of the

unskilled SEG, whereas the proportion taking recommended physical activity levels was just under a third in all socio-economic groups.

Intermediate activity levels were highest amongst respondents who had never smoked (50%) and lowest amongst current smokers (44%), whereas the proportion taking recommended levels was highest amongst current smokers (31%) and lowest amongst people who had never smoked (26%)



Barriers to regular physical activity

Respondents were asked to indicate the things that made it difficult for them to take regular physical activity.

The main things that made it difficult to take regular exercise were, being too busy (40%), not having enough time (39%), being too tired (33%) and a lack of motivation (33%). Limiting health reasons were also an important barrier (31%).

Women in general tended to perceive more barriers to exercise than men, particularly, being too busy, too tired to exercise or lacking in motivation.

Men were more likely than women to indicate work or an injury as a barrier to exercise.

Level of physical activity

The main things that made it difficult for people who were sedentary to take regular exercise were largely health related. The main barriers reported were limiting health reasons (67%), due to illness (57%) and due to physical disability (47%).

The most prevalent difficulties not relating to health were being too tired by exercise (44%), too tired to exercise (41%) and lacking in motivation (27%).

Motivations to take regular physical activity

Respondents were asked to indicate the things that might motivate them to be physically active.

The main things that were a motivation to take regular physical activity were good health (91%), to feel better in general (88%), to stay in shape (81%) and to maintain proper body weight (78%).

Age and sex

Women were more likely than men to feel that 'improving their appearance' was a motivation to exercise regularly (71% compared with 57%).

Most 16-24 year olds (92%) felt that 'staying in shape' was a motivation for them to take regular exercise compared

with less than half (46%) of those aged 75 and above. Most respondents aged 75 and over indicated that good health (78%) and to feel better in general (70%) might motivate them to be physically active.

Level of physical activity

Although they took little exercise, respondents who were sedentary still identified a lot of things that might motivate them to take regular exercise, including; good health (80%), to make me feel better (76%), to maintain proper body weight (65%) and staying in shape (64%).

Intentions regarding regular physical activity

In addition to asking about their level of physical activity in the last 7 days, respondents were also asked more generally about their intentions to start being physically active or how recently they had started being physically active.

A quarter (24%) of respondents said they did not take regular physical activity and did not intend to be so in the next 6 months.

11% of respondents said they did not take regular physical activity but were thinking about starting to do so in the next 6 months.

32% of respondents said they did some physical activity, but not enough to meet the criteria for regular physical activity.

5% of respondents said they took regular physical activity but had only begun in the previous 6 months.

27% of respondents said they took regular physical activity and had been doing so for longer than 6 months.

Age and Sex

Women (25%) were more likely than men (22%) to have no intention of being regularly active in the next 6 months and men were more likely than women to have been regularly physically active for more than 6 months, 33% and 23% respectively.

The elderly were more likely to have no intention of being regularly physically active than the young, 61% of those aged 75+ compared with 7% of those aged 16-24.

Socio economic group

Those respondents in the unskilled SEG were over twice as likely as those in the professional/ managerial SEG to have no intention of being regularly physically active. (35% and 14% respectively).

Employment status

Unemployed respondents were almost three times as likely as those in employment to have no intention of being regularly physically active in the next 6 months (28% and 10% respectively).

Limiting long standing illness

Respondents with a limiting long standing illness were over four times as likely as those without a limiting long standing illness to have no intention of becoming regularly physically active (53% and 13% respectively).

Cigarette smoking

People who smoke cigarettes on a regular basis were more likely to have no intention of becoming regularly physically active than those who have never smoked cigarettes (27% and 21% respectively).

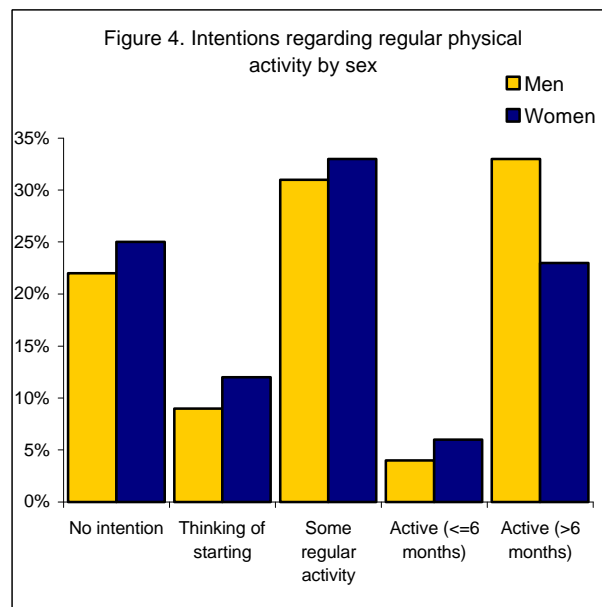
Physical activity levels

Of particular interest were the future intentions of those with a sedentary or intermediate level of activity. 63% of respondents who are sedentary and 13% of those in the intermediate group had no intention of being regularly active, while 10% and 13% respectively were thinking about starting.

Respondents of all ages who were sedentary were more likely than those in the intermediate activity group to have no intention of becoming physically active.

Injury/disability/ limiting medical conditions

49% of respondents who said they had an injury/ disability/ medical condition, which limits their physical activity, had no intention of becoming physically active in the next six months.



For additional copies of this bulletin or for the detailed tables and technical report, please contact:

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