

Sedentary behaviour

Indicator overview

VicHealth Indicators Survey

VicHealth Indicators are used to measure community wellbeing with a focus on social determinants of health.

Survey topic areas include: wellbeing, healthy eating and sedentary behaviour, use of green space and safety, smoking policy, alcohol, using of social networking, participation in arts activities and the community, social attitudes, and work, life and time.

Introduction

Compared to the experience of previous generations, modern life for many is increasingly sedentary (inactive, with prolonged sitting time). Sedentary behaviour, combined with a lack of physical activity through exercise, is a public health concern (Owen et al. 2009, Owen et al. 2010). The combination of an increased reliance on cars for transportation, sedentary leisure activities such as watching TV, and office-based workplaces that require people to sit for long periods, means that we are physically inactive for much of the day (Owen et al. 2010). Sedentary behaviour may contribute to excess weight gain and chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and certain types of cancers (Owen et al. 2009, Owen et al. 2010).

Health issues

A large population study that examined the health impact of prolonged TV viewing reported a greater risk of premature death in adults who watched more than four hours per day (Dunstan et al. 2010). The authors of the study concluded that in addition to engaging in the recommended amount of moderate to vigorous physical activity, people need to be mindful of how much time they spend sitting throughout the day.

Self-reported sitting time (a useful measure of overall sedentary behaviour) has been identified as a predictor of weight gain in Australian women, even after adjustment for energy intake and leisure time physical activity (Brown et al. 2005) has been taken into consideration. Even though a person may be physically active (by running, walking, going to the gym, playing sport, swimming and so on), there is a possibility that long periods of sedentary time may offset the benefits of physical activity (Owen et al. 2010). This means that even those who are physically active may be at risk of developing chronic disease. It is recommended that, in addition to reducing overall sitting time, people accumulate more body movement throughout the day via incidental activity breaks (Department of Health and Ageing 2005). These might involve walking to the shops instead of driving, taking the stairs instead of the lift and walking to a colleague's desk instead of sending them an email.

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation

PO Box 154
Carlton South, VIC 3053 Australia
T +61 3 9667 1333
F +61 3 9667 1375
vichealth@vichealth.vic.gov.au
www.vichealth.vic.gov.au

November 2012
ISBN: 978-1-921822-80-3
Publication number: K-040-KN

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Promotion Foundation 2012

Recommended guidelines

The National Physical Activity Guidelines (Department of Health and Ageing 2005) recommend the following for adults:

- Think of movement as an opportunity – not an inconvenience.
- Be active every day in as many ways as you can.
- Put together at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most, and preferably all, days.
- Where possible, enjoy some regular, vigorous activity for extra health and fitness.

For people from five to 18 years old, the Guidelines recommend 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity each day.

Find out more

An active way to better health, Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra.

[www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-physical-activity-adults-pdf-cnt.htm/\\$File/adults_phys.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-physical-activity-adults-pdf-cnt.htm/$File/adults_phys.pdf)

Creating healthy workplaces – reducing prolonged sitting in the workplace, VicHealth.

www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Economic-participation/Creating_Healthy_Workplaces.aspx
www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Publications/Video-Gallery/Reducing-prolonged-sitting-in-the-workplace.aspx [video]

Ground breaking link found between TV viewing time and mortality, VicHealth.

www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/en/Media-Centre/Media-Releases-by-Topic/Preventing-chronic-disease/Television-viewing-time-and-mortality.aspx

Physical activity, Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra.

www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/health-pubhlth-strateg-phys-act-guidelines#rec_5_12

Physical activity – it's important, Better Health Channel.

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Physical_activity_its_important?open

References

Brown, WJ, Williams, L, Ford, JH, Ball, K & Dobson, AJ 2005, 'Identifying the energy gap: magnitude and determinants of 5-year weight gain in midage women', *Obesity Research*, vol. 13(8), pp. 1431-1441.

Department of Health and Ageing 2005, *National physical activity guidelines for adults*, Canberra, viewed 10 April 2012, <<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/phd-physical-activity-adults-pdf-cnt.htm>>.

Dunstan, D, Barr, E, Healy, G, Salmon, J, Shaw, J, Balkau, B, Magliano, D, Cameron, A, Zimmet, P & Owen, N 2010, 'Television viewing time and mortality', *Circulation*, vol. 121(3), pp. 384-391.

Owen, N, Bauman, A & Brown, W 2009, 'Too much sitting: a novel and important predictor of chronic disease risk?', *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, vol. 43(2), pp. 81-83.

Owen, N, Healy, GN, Matthews, CE & Dunstan, DW 2010, 'Too much sitting: the population health science of sedentary behavior', *Exercise and Sport Sciences Reviews*, vol. 38(3), p. 105.