

“I think of being active as intentionally getting my heart rate up and sweating and puffing. If I’m not a bit puffed and sweaty, I don’t really consider it exercise.”

—Father, Melbourne



Parents

Physical activity insights

Parenthood is a life stage characterised by ‘busy-ness’. A focus on child-raising combined with multiple, competing priorities leads to reduced ‘free’ time, which becomes a highly valued commodity.

Almost two-thirds of Victorian parents (62%) wish they had more time for exercise. Where physical activity is not part of their current weekly or daily routine, fitting it in can be seen as a major hurdle.

In addition to time, other barriers to physical activity include:

- most parents (64%) believe it is too expensive to join a gym or play organised sport
- many believe that a block of 30 minutes of physical activity ‘doesn’t count’.
- sport participation is not a popular activity for parents (only 13% of mums and 21% of dads play weekly).

This life stage snapshot is part of a set looking at levels of physical activity among Victorians. It has been developed from research commissioned by VicHealth and explores what influences Victorians to be less or more active, and what would motivate them to change their existing behaviours.

To view the other snapshots and for more information, visit www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/lifestages

While eight out of ten parents understand their influence on their children’s activity levels (83%) and the importance of role modelling, fewer than seven out of ten (69%) of parents try to set an example by exercising themselves.

Facilitating their children’s activity (e.g. providing/ paying for opportunities and transport) and discussing physical activity with them are more common forms of encouragement. Inactive parents are less likely to recognise the role parents play in how physically active their children are.

Activity levels of parents



‘Inactive’ = no days of 30-minute sessions of physical activity per week; ‘Somewhat active’ = 1 to 3 days of 30-minute sessions per week; ‘Active’ = 4+ days of 30-minute sessions per week.

Victorian mums and dads:



Believe parents have a big influence on how physically active their kids are



Encourage their kids to be active every day



Try to set a good example by being physically active for their kids

While being active together as a family is seen by many as the ideal:

- finding opportunities that suit both parents and young children can be challenging
- parents of older children don't believe their kids want to participate with them.

There are some common barriers for parents to become involved in regular sport:

- some parents have never played sport, and have little interest in doing so.
- for some parents, their desire to be reliable and not let their team down by not attending the majority of games is a significant barrier.
- some believe that they would need to attend training as well as games, which adds to the commitment.

AMONG ALL VICTORIAN ADULTS:

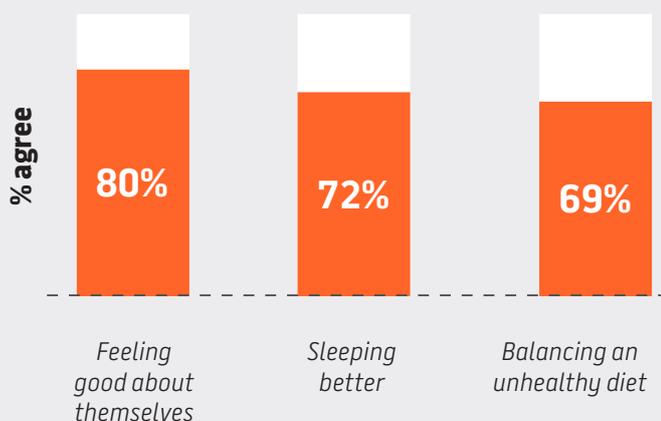
3% are inactive mums

2% are inactive dads

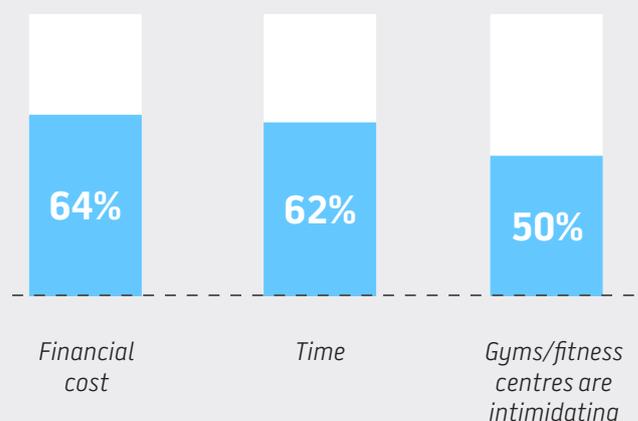
6% are somewhat active mums

5% are somewhat active dads

Perceived benefits of physical activity for parents



Barriers to physical activity for parents



Focus on mums

Mums are more likely than dads to be inactive, and their physical activity levels are strongly linked to the ages of their children.

- Mums with young babies often increase their physical activity while their baby is restrained in a pram.
- Once children can't or won't stay in a pram for long, mums are restricted in the type of activity they can participate in without arranging child care.

- As children become older and increasingly independent mums are freed up to pursue activities more focused on themselves.

Size, shape and fitting into clothes are great motivation for mums and for them physical activity is clearly linked to both weight loss and weight management.

BARRIERS FOR MUMS

Feel intimidated

About one in two (49%) mums feel intimidated by sporting clubs, and three in ten (31%) agree that sporting clubs are not welcoming of Victorians like them

Sacrificing time out or "me" time

Participating in physical activity can mean sacrificing time out or "me" time. Many mums have a strong preference to spend any spare time on social or more sedentary activities other than physical activity.

Lack of good, safe walking paths

Active transport is a key form of physical activity for mums and so a lack of good, safe walking paths is an issue for mums in some areas.

THE BARRIERS FOR INACTIVE MUMS ARE EVEN GREATER

Less likely to see the benefits of physical activity

They are less likely than other parents to feel that doing 30 minutes more activity each week is something they could try, and are less likely to see the benefits of physical activity.

Feel embarrassed exercising in public

More than half (53%) feel embarrassed exercising in public, and even more are intimidated by gyms and fitness centres (71%). This is particularly true among those who are overweight or obese.

Low household income

They are more likely to be on a low household income than those more active.

Activity levels of mums

INACTIVE
20%

SOMEWHAT ACTIVE
38%

ACTIVE
43%

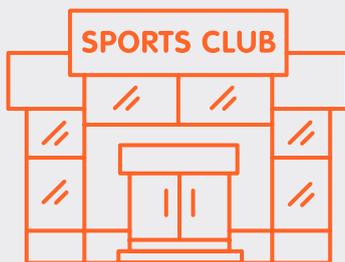
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Meet Lorna, *an inactive mum*

Lorna is 43-year old mum of three kids aged 9, 7 and 2. Her day typically starts with getting the older kids ready for school. She then does housework, occasionally has coffee with friends with the youngest in tow, and then it's school pick-up followed by the children's activities.

Lorna tries to encourage her kids to do sport but thinks it would be better if she was also setting a good example herself. Over a year ago, she joined her local neighbourhood centre's Pilates classes when her youngest was still sleeping in the pram. These days though, an active toddler means she is restricted in the type of activity she can participate in without arranging child care and she can't really justify the expense.



Joining a sporting club is an intimidating idea for Lorna. Similar to other mums she knows, she feels they are not welcoming places. Besides, she doesn't think she's very co-ordinated, having not played a lot of sport at school. She dabbled in dance with a group in the local park, but felt embarrassed doing it in public.

Lorna tries to go for walks with friends or do a few laps in the local pool when a family member can look after her toddler, but feels guilty about taking time out to exercise. Lorna feels the need to seek permission from her partner to schedule in a regular physical activity.

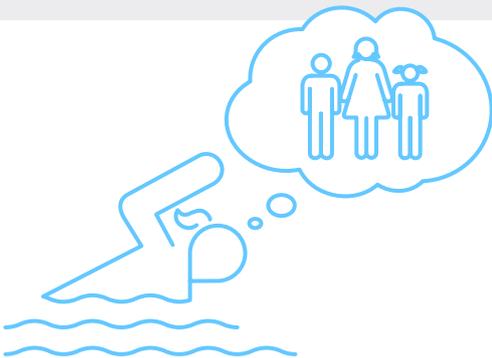


She thinks it would be good to get back into some sort of exercise, even half an hour once or twice a week, as she wants to get back to her weight and shape from before the children came. She knows physical activity has actual health benefits too, but that doesn't motivate her enough to do it. If Lorna had any spare time at all, she would prioritise resting at home or spending time with friends over getting active, and even more over playing competitive sport.

Meet Faridah, a somewhat active mum

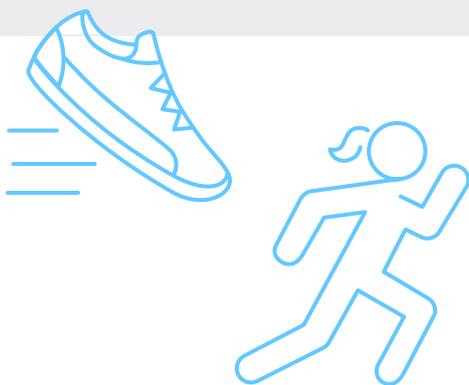
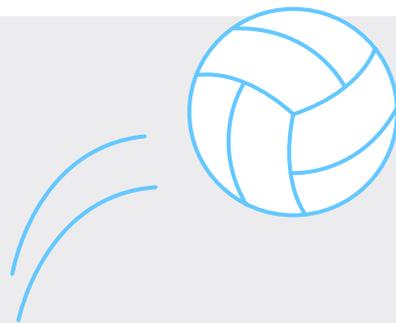


Faridah is Lorna's neighbour. Her children are now 12 and 14 years old, which means they're more independent and can walk to and from school on their own.



Faridah has gone back to work part-time at her former uni, which keeps her busy but allows her the flexibility to get home early to help her children with homework. She also swims at the local pool on her non-work days, for about half an hour. This is an activity she feels is easy and achievable. Occasionally, she goes for a run alone or plays table tennis with her kids. She wishes they could spend more time being active together as a family.

Faridah's work friends want her to join their evening sports team but the regularity, commitment and cost of joining are hurdles. She also doesn't think that she's 'sporty' enough to join a proper club and feels she will let her friends down.



Having said that, Faridah wants to have a bit more physical activity in her normal routine, as the swimming and occasional run make her feel good about herself and she feels sharper and sleeps better after being active. Her children are in their school's cross-country teams and this also motivates her to be active in her own way.

Like Lorna, if Faridah had spare time, she'd rather catch up with her relatives or friends than do exercise. Most of their get-togethers do revolve around food and so she then feels motivated to go swimming to burn the extra kilojoules!



Focus on dads

More likely to think about being active

Victorian dads are more likely than mums to prioritise physical activity without feeling the need to ask their partner's permission.

More dads than mums have increased their physical activity levels in the past year.

Find it easier to exercise with someone else

Victorian dads enjoy the social aspects of meeting up with friends or team mates for group activities or sports, and 65% say it is easier to exercise with someone else.

Want to share activities enjoyed in childhood with their own children

This allows some dads to "relive their childhood".

Reminiscing about their own pursuits provides a great sense of enjoyment.

Activity levels of dads



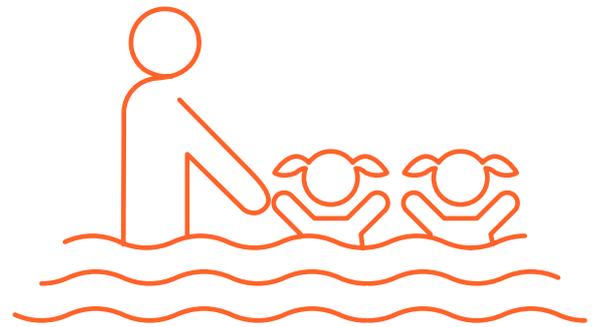
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Meet Bi'nh, *an inactive dad*

Bi'nh is 36 years old. He and his partner, Hoa, have three-year-old twin girls. Bi'nh's high level government job keeps him working late most evenings and by the time he arrives home, it's time for the girls to go to bed. He likes to read their bedtime stories and often winds them up with tickles and cuddles just to get some time with them each day, but this leaves no time for exercise.

Bi'nh is exhausted on the weekends and would love nothing better than a sleep-in. But the girls have swimming lessons at 8.30am on Saturdays and both need a parent with them in the water. He and Hoa both go. After lessons, they go for brunch. Weekends are 'family time', but this is the only personal time he has.



The girls are quite energetic and Bi'nh's non-parent friends say it must keep him fit running after them all the time, but Bi'nh doesn't count swing-pushing and the instruction of bike-riding as physical activity. It's more mentally exhausting.

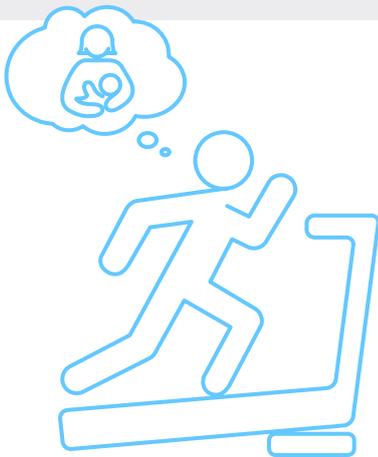
He mows the lawn, does that count?



Meet Paul, *a somewhat active dad*



Paul lives in the western suburbs with his wife, Sophie, and three kids. His job takes him away from home quite regularly. His youngest is still a baby and his wife is on maternity leave, so Paul feels the pressure of being away from his family a lot and therefore the need to help out when he is there.



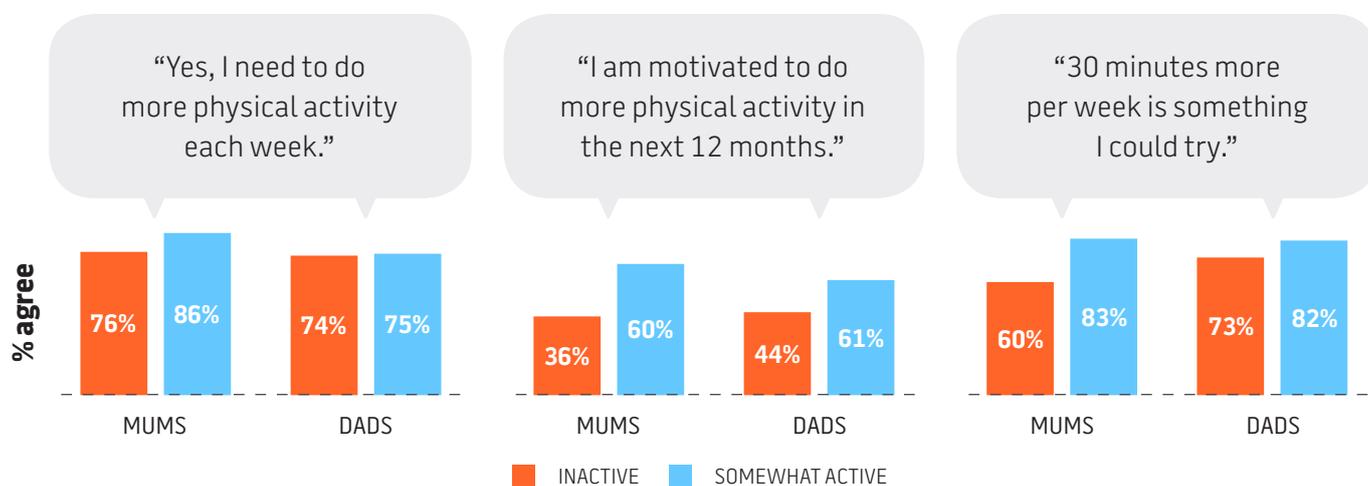
Paul's job, although hectic, comes with some perks, one of which is a gym membership. He goes after work three times a week when he's not travelling. But he does feel guilty for exercising when Sophie is at home with the kids – particularly when he has been away. He tries to encourage Sophie to exercise more (although he's not sure she takes this as the nice gesture he means it as). He would feel less guilty if she also took some time for herself.

While he'd love to get out and play footy with his eight-year-old son like he did with his own father, the last time they got out for a kick, it left him breathless and begging for a break. His own father was a lot younger than 46 when he was eight, but he doesn't really want to use his age as an excuse. He still feels he should be able to kick as he did when he was in his twenties. He has vowed to try to get fitter.



Paul is sure he'd sleep better if he exercised more (and if his youngest ever started sleeping through the night). He feels that when the kids are older, he'll be able to get some more time to exercise and plans to build it into family time, like family bike rides, or early morning jogging with the kids.

Are less active parents ready to do more physical activity?



Trigger points for parents

Triggers for increasing physical activity will be most successful at times when routines change, and Victorians are reflecting on their life. For parents, triggers include:

-  Pregnancy
-  Birth of a child
-  Childcare & school transitions
-  Children's sport & activity seasons
-  Going back to work/change in work days
-  Family breakdown
-  Change in season, particularly cold weather

How should we talk to parents about being physically active?

- Reinforce their influence as a parent and encourage active role modelling.
- Introduce and reinforce the notion of planning and routine.
- Raise awareness of options for being active – i.e. different types of activity and what's available locally.
- Reinforce the social aspects of sport, and ensure a welcoming and non-judgemental atmosphere (especially for mums).
- Highlight the recognised benefits – feeling good, sleeping better, weight management.

Only around half of inactive Victorian parents (54% of mums and 53% of dads) are daily social media users.



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