

# Young adults (18–24)

## Physical activity insights

“I have always felt more compelled by team sports. I have a lot more fun playing them and having the support and pressure of others around me often motivates me.”

– Young male, Melbourne



**Young Victorian adults (aged 18 to 24) are undergoing a period of significant change in their lives, with many completing secondary school and going on to tertiary study or trade qualifications, starting work and forging a career, moving out of home and starting serious relationships. They are exploring a new-found sense of independence and freedom, which can be both exciting and daunting.**

Young Victorian adults:

- are the most active segment of the population (28% of men and 17% of women in this segment are active on six or seven days per week) and the most likely to participate in sport weekly (44% of men and 22% of women)
- have greater spontaneity and less routine determining the activities they participate in
- tend to move in and out of periods of being regularly active more frequently than older adults.

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](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/lifestages)

The high sport participation rates in this segment are driven by fun and enjoyment, the thrill of competition and the will to win. However, a notable portion of young Victorians are simply not interested in sport and gain no enjoyment from it.

While for older segments a change in routine can encourage increases in physical activity, for young adults who are losing the disciplined structure of school, this change often has the opposite effect and their physical activity decreases. Young Victorians are often more spontaneous, with plans regularly changing, and influenced by their peers.

### Activity levels of young adults



'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.

**AMONG ALL  
VICTORIAN ADULTS:**

**3%** are  
**less active**  
young people

Belief in their ability to undertake physical activity is strong among active young Victorians and moderate among less active young Victorians. This perceived ability decreases for inactive young Victorians who have a lack of interest or urgency in being active. Young Victorians are quick to affirm the health benefits of physical activity, but are less likely to be committed to physical activity for this reason. They see health benefits as more relevant to older Victorians.

Young adults have competing priorities on their time. While students clearly see the benefits of physical activity on their thinking and sleeping, they often sacrifice physical activity during intense study periods. Many young adults also prioritise socialising and sleep over physical activity.

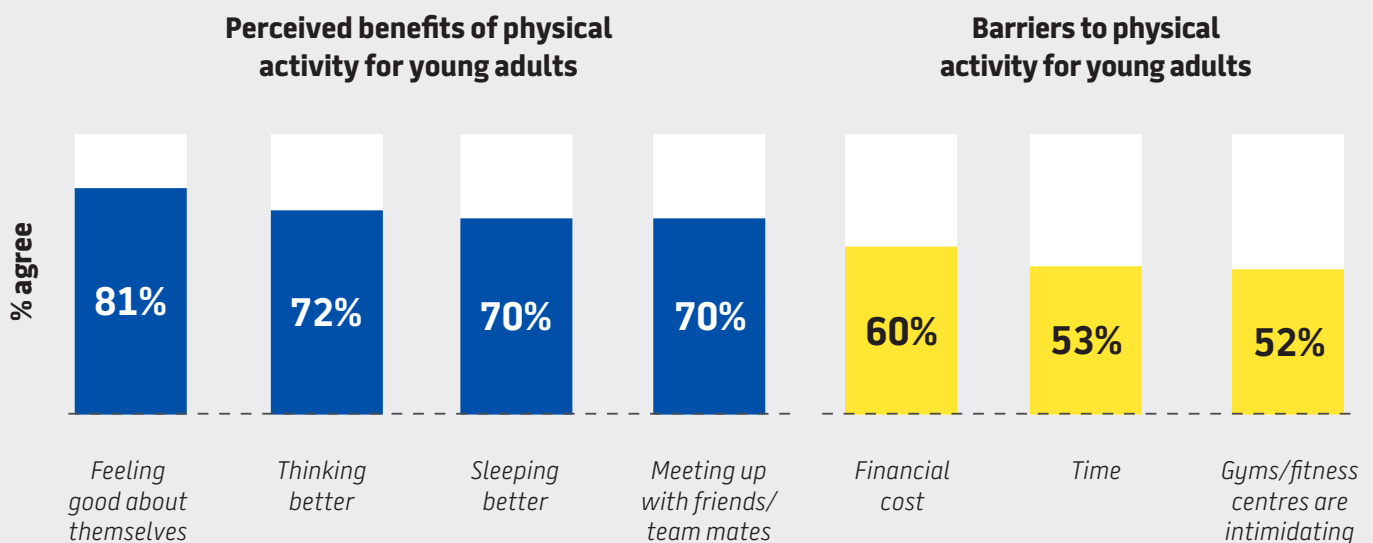
Young adults also have to prioritise how to spend their money and, for most, physical activity is prioritised behind the basics of living (rent, food, transport), as well as socialising. Social factors (including peer pressure and alcohol culture) have a big impact, with young adults reluctant to sacrifice money for alcohol and going out in order to exercise.

While the two biggest claimed barriers to participating in physical activity are time and money, for many it's "just not their thing", and certainly "not cool". This lack of interest, combined with the effort required (particularly for inactive young Victorians), and the subsequent pain, overrides any perceived benefits.

**Inactive and somewhat active young adults are:**

- more likely to be students
- less likely to be in the workforce
- less likely to be daily users of social media

**...than their more active peers.**



# Focus on young women

## Use physical activity when trying to lose weight

Young women use physical activity for weight maintenance, and when trying to lose weight. A motivator for all young Victorians is to look good to attract a partner, with both males and females particularly body conscious at this stage of life.

## Feel embarrassed exercising in public

Almost half (49%) of young women feel embarrassed exercising in public. Embarrassment and intimidation is a real barrier for young women, with young women in particular less keen to expose their bodies to the scrutiny of their peers.

## Find it easier to exercise with someone else than on your own

The social aspect of physical activity is important for young women, with 63% saying that it is easier to exercise with someone else than on your own.

## Think sports clubs are intimidating

For a significant portion of young women (59%), sporting clubs are seen to be intimidating, particularly for those who are not currently active. This is significantly higher than the proportion of young men who find sporting clubs intimidating (35%).

## Feel they don't have the right skills

Some young Victorians (more likely young women), feel they don't have the requisite skills or innate ability to participate in sports.

## Activity levels of young women



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## Meet Li Lee, *an inactive young Victorian*



**L**i Lee, or Lily as her friends call her, is from regional Victoria and is in her first year at university in Melbourne. She has moved into a share house near the uni. This is Lily's first time living away from home and she is learning how to get by on a limited budget for food, transport and books.



**S**he has settled into her course well and has made new friends who she hangs out with on campus. They have planned a holiday together for the semester break and she is trying to save up for it. She takes her studies seriously and regularly gets up at 6am and only gets to bed at midnight, devoting her time to reviews, classes and these days, uni society activities (which she thinks will be good for her resume). There are also periods of high intensity study during exams and when assignments are due.

**T**his routine prevents Lily from being involved in sport or a regular form of exercise. She is not averse to sport, having been active in high school, but hasn't heard about any local clubs. Time is her current biggest constraint, preferring to allocate any free time to catching up on sleep.



**S**he does not see herself as unhealthy and so feels no urgency for being active. She was persuaded by her uni friends to join them in a charity run, although she's starting to get worried about how her body will look in active wear.



## Meet Chloe, *a somewhat active young Victorian*

**C**hloe, 23 years old, works at a printing company in the outer suburbs. She lives about half an hour's drive away from her workplace. As part of the production team, she is expected to be at work at 8am. She enjoys the benefit of being able to leave at 5pm most of the time.

**C**hloe is excited to be part of a major firm. This is her first 'big' job after her design diploma and pays enough for rent in a share house, as well as spending time with friends, which usually means taking the train into the city for a night out.



**C**hloe goes for a run around her block when she can so that she can maintain her weight, but only if she doesn't have other plans. Occasionally, a girlfriend invites her to the local gym for a body pump class after work but Chloe never goes to the gym on her own. Doing the class with her friend is her motivation to go.

**C**hloe has considered joining weekend team sports but doesn't like the idea of joining a club. She played for a club a few years ago and didn't like the culture there and felt like an outsider.



**C**hloe wants to balance out the effect of eating out frequently and wants to look good as well. She wishes there were activities that combined socialising and physical activity because she knows she'll always choose friends over exercise!

# Focus on young men

## Use physical activity to look good physically

Three-quarters of young Victorian men feel that physical activity is a good way to balance an unhealthy diet.

Looking good to attract a partner is an important motivator for young men, with both males and females particularly body conscious at this stage of life.

## May not think the health benefits of physical activity are relevant to them

While young Victorian adults are quick to affirm the health benefits of physical activity, for many (and men in particular), these are seen to be more relevant to older age groups. Only 44% of young Victorian men feel that physical activity makes a difference to their health.

## Find it easier to exercise with someone else than on their own

Young men enjoy the social aspects of meeting up with friends or team mates for group activities or sports, and 69% say it is easier to exercise with someone else.

## See physical activity as a deliberate act of exertion

More than half of young men feel that it's not really exercise unless you are puffing and sweating, and that physical activity around the house or garden doesn't really count.

However, a significant proportion (38%) don't like "getting all sweaty".

## Use physical activity to relieve stress

Almost three-quarters (72%) of young Victorian men find that physical activity feels good after a stressful day (compared with 51% of young women).

## Activity levels of young men

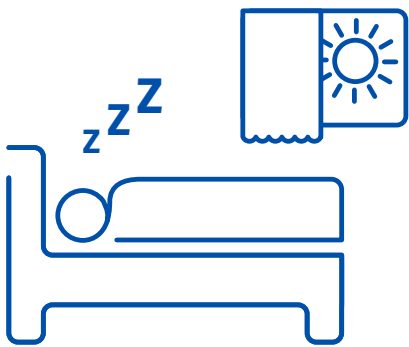


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## Meet Angus, *an inactive young Victorian*

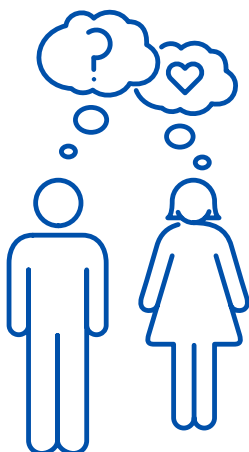
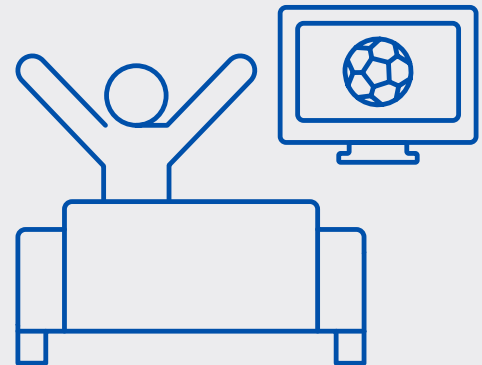


**A**ngus is in his second year at university in Melbourne and has a casual job at a movie theatre. He lives at home with his parents, but pays them board and contributes to meals and housework. He prefers to spend his limited spare time and money going out with friends.

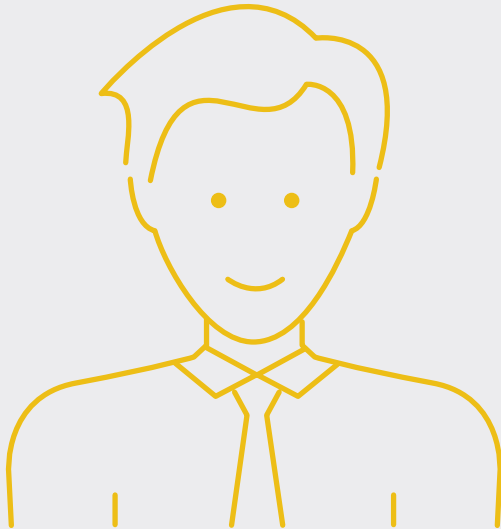


**A**ngus' course is quite time-consuming. Because of many late nights spent either studying or with friends, he likes to sleep in, so finds it difficult to drag himself out of bed in the morning to exercise. The social nights and his sporadic schedule generally leaves Angus skipping meals, eating on the run (or at odd times) and not making the best food choices. His own family are not particularly active and he didn't grow up with active parents, so doesn't see it as a priority for his life.

**A**ngus played a bit of sport during high school, both in a school team and with friends during lunch times and on weekends. He can't quite remember when this stopped, but never really expected he would be as inactive (as he is today). These days, he doesn't mind watching sport on TV, but participating in organised sport just isn't his thing – he doesn't like getting sweaty.



**H**e would like to look better and possibly date someone at the university, but feels he has plenty of time to do that sort of thing in the future.



## Meet Jim, *a somewhat active young Victorian*

**J**im is 24 years old and works as an accountant in a city firm. He doesn't own a car and takes the train to work from the outer eastern suburbs and uses the long trip to catch up on emails or read the news online. He enjoys his job and works hard, hoping to earn a promotion.

**A**fter work mid-week, Jim catches up with mates. Sometimes this includes playing a casual game of basketball at the local public court and he finds this good for relieving stress after a busy day. But he has not participated in an organised team since he played for the Koori Tigers four or five years ago and feels he has lost a lot of his skill.



**J**im's job pays fairly well and he is able to relax on the weekends with friends by going out to dinner, or to see a band or a movie. He doesn't mind having a dance when out with his girlfriend, Emily, but wouldn't say he's particularly good at it. It's more a bit of fun than anything else.

**O**n Saturday mornings, he often goes for a bike ride with a friend followed by a coffee and/or breakfast at a local café. Some weekends, he and Emily go on bushwalking trips. It is something they have in common and they spend time planning the trips together, but he doesn't consider it exercise. They barely break a sweat.





# Are less active young adults ready to do more physical activity?

“Yes, I need to do more physical activity each week.”

“I am motivated to do more physical activity in the next 12 months.”

“30 minutes more per week is something I could try.”

79%

63%

87%

■ LESS ACTIVE YOUNG PEOPLE (% AGREE)

In this chart, ‘inactive’ and ‘somewhat active’ have been grouped together as ‘less active’. Less active young Victorians do 0–3 days of 30 minute sessions of physical activity per week.

## Trigger points for young adults

Triggers for increasing physical activity will be most successful at times of change, when Victorians are reflecting on their life. For young adults, these times include:



Leaving school



Tertiary graduation



Moving out of family home



Moving to a new area



Change of sporting season



Change in employment



Change in relationships



Season/weather

## How should we talk to young adults about being physically active?

- Introduce and reinforce the notion of planning and routine.
- Highlight the recognised benefits – socialising, weight management and enjoyment of sport.
- Emphasise the benefits of thinking and sleeping better, particularly during exam periods.
- Depict spontaneous physical activity, and consider reminders at change of sporting season.

Young adults are particularly open to workplace activity initiatives, and these could provide the foundation for culture change within workplaces to increase physical activity levels for all employees.



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