

“We need to rethink how we embed physical activity in young people’s daily routines so it becomes a sustainable way of life, rather than rely solely on physical activity at school.”

– Jerril Rechter, CEO, VicHealth

Youth (12–17)

Physical activity insights



Youth is a period of massive changes, encompassing the transition from primary school to secondary school and then childhood to adulthood. These include physical, mental, social and intellectual changes, at the same time as becoming increasingly independent.

Under 18s spend their time across a range of activities including studying, playing sport, part-time work, learning how to drive and other pastimes outside school including volunteering.

Self-esteem and confidence are key in this life stage, as these help young people accept challenges. Peer influence is paramount and most seek support from their close friends.

Socialising both face-to-face and online are normal. The ease of online communications means their interactions extend beyond the people in their physical vicinities. This can have a positive or

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

negative effect on their confidence. For example, the way they perceive themselves could change quickly based on an online comment about personal appearance.

Only one in five 5–17 years olds is getting the recommended one hour of physical activity each day. Between the ages of 12 and 17, physical activity levels decrease as age increases. Studies have also shown that participation in community sport drops significantly from the age of 15.

Activity levels of youths



‘Inactive’ = no days of 60-minute sessions of physical activity per week; ‘Somewhat active’ = 1 to 3 days of 60-minute sessions per week; ‘Active’ = 4+ days of 60-minute sessions per week.

AMONG ALL VICTORIAN YOUTH:

7% are **inactive** girls

6% are **inactive** boys

18% are **somewhat active** girls

19% are **somewhat active** boys

There is a lower proportion of inactive Victorian youths than adults (13% youth compared with 20% adults), with a correspondingly higher proportion of those in the 'somewhat active' category.

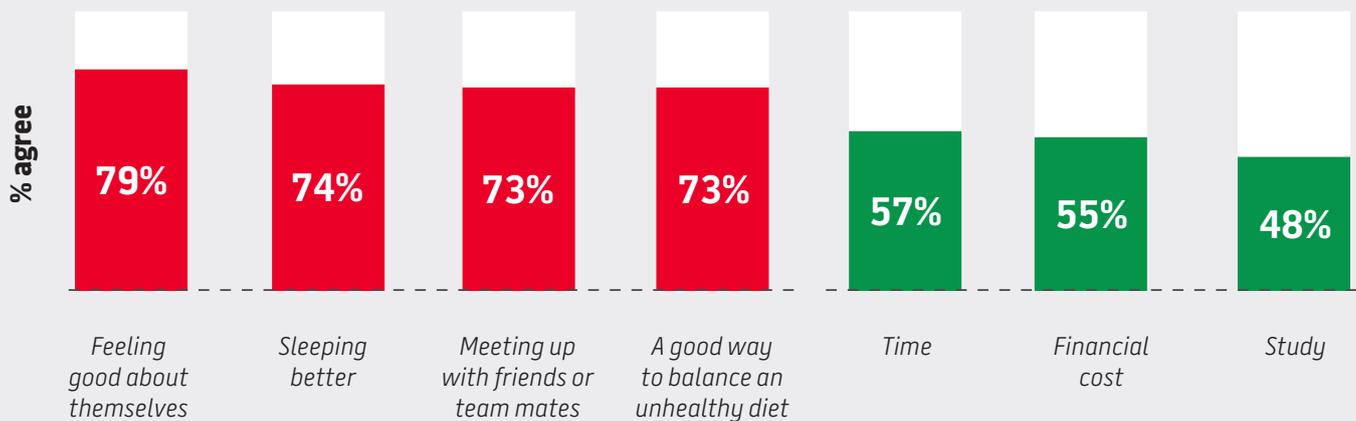
- Most Victorian youths participate in sport (75% of males and 71% of females participate regularly).
- Physical Education (PE) classes at school represent the top weekly activity (78% participate).
- Non-competitive sport is a popular activity, with more than half (56%) participating on a regular basis. A third (34%) participate in club-based competitive sport.

Two-thirds of youths are distracted by screens when they could be doing something active

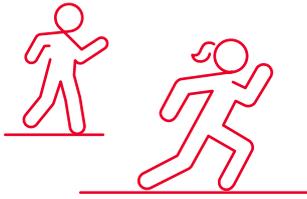
While their perceived ability to undertake physical activity is strong among Victorian youths, more than two-thirds (68%) report being distracted by screen-based activities.

Perceived benefits of physical activity for youth

Barriers to physical activity for youth



OTHER INFLUENCES



Parents

- Active youths are more likely than others to have active parents, and motivation levels are also linked. Encouragement on its own is not enough – children with parents who actively set a good example have higher activity levels.
- Only 65% of youths report that their parents let them walk or ride to places on their own.



School

- While three-quarters report that their school encourages them to play sport (78%) and be 'really active' (74%), only 60% feel their school encourages active transport (non-motorised transport between destinations such as walking, cycling or scooting).



Friends

- Being part of their group is a reason for being active for almost half of this life stage (58% of boys and 38% of girls).
- Active youths are more likely to be surrounded by active friends.

Focus on girls

Wish they had more time

63% of girls wish they had more time to do more exercise.

Easier to exercise with someone else

74% of girls think it is easier to exercise with someone else.

Need more activities in the area

Nearly half of girls (44%) also claim they would be more active if there were more sports and activities available in their area.

Activity levels of girls

INACTIVE
14%

SOMEWHAT ACTIVE
38%

ACTIVE
47%

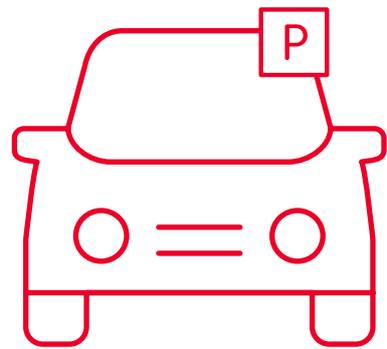
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Meet Ashleigh, *a somewhat active girl*

Ashleigh is in her final year at the local secondary school and has a part-time job at a fast food chain. She is into music and plays in the school band, which sometimes means taking part in competitions.

Ashleigh is eager to complete her driving hours and prepare for her P plate test. She has started saving up to buy a small second-hand car but for now she is dependent on her dad to drive her around. This, and her busy school schedule, limits what she can do.



In her spare time, when she's not preparing for her exams she hangs out with friends. This could mean going to the beach, playing Frisbee in the park, a bike ride or going to a party. If it's a school night, Ashleigh often combines studying with messaging friends and watching online videos.

Ashleigh used to play tennis competitively but, between training and matches, she felt it was taking up too much of her time and she was also feeling less confident about her ability. She now plays mixed social tennis on a Tuesday night with other teenagers as well as adults who are a similar standard to her. She still enjoys it and figures that it's a good way to maintain her weight ahead of the school formal at the end of the year.



Focus on boys

Like to be part of a group

Three-quarters of boys (74%) say most of their friends are physically active, and more than half (58%) who are active note that the reason is to be part of their group.

May struggle to find an activity they enjoy

More than one-third of boys (35%) claim “there’s just no sort of physical activity I like doing”.

However, nearly half (46%) say they would be more active if there were more sports and activities available in their area.

Have greater freedom to be independently active

More boys than girls report that their parents let them walk or ride to places, or visit local parks, on their own.

Despite this, 29% still feel they have to travel too far to exercise.

Activity levels of boys



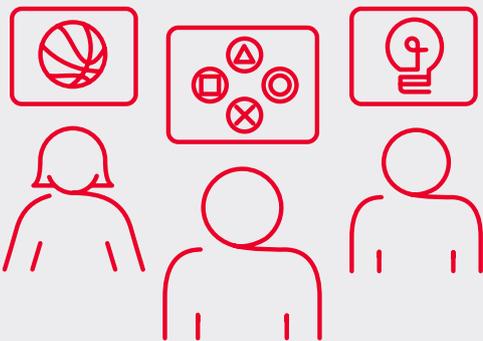
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Meet Seb, *a somewhat active boy*

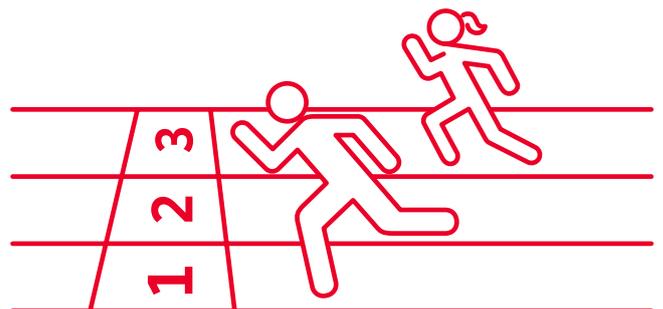
Seb is 13 and in his first year at the local secondary school. He participates in PE classes as part of the school curriculum and he cycles to school, but – as he only lives a few streets away – it doesn't feel like exercise.

After homework on weekdays (or even sometimes while he should be doing his homework) and on weekends, Seb spends his time playing computer and online games. His parents tell him he should go outdoors, but they've never been very active themselves, so they don't push the matter. Instead, they insist he should focus more on studying. Besides, he's never been big on BMX bike riding or skateboarding like some of the others in his class.

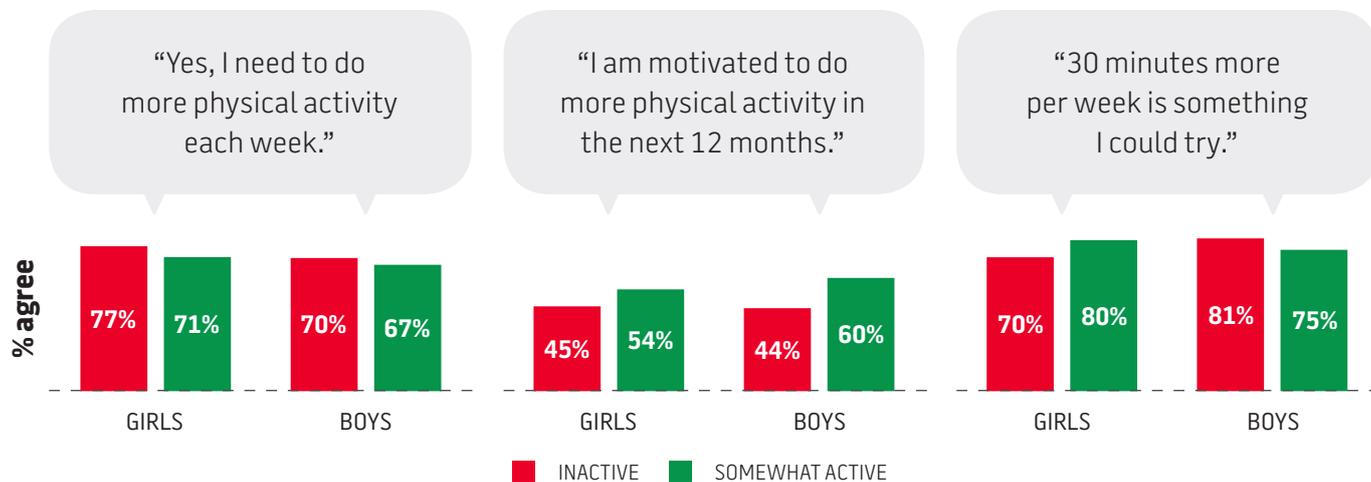


Seb's older brother, Zac, isn't active either, but his oldest sister, Izzy, plays basketball and football and is considered 'the sporty one' by the family. Seb's family role is 'the gamer', while Zac is 'the smart one'. Sometimes he feels he is put in a box with this title, but he doesn't do anything to break away from it. Instead, he feels the title gives him license to continue playing his games.

Seb and his friends would sometimes like to play sports games on the oval at lunchtimes, but the school grounds are not very grassy and susceptible to mud, so it's not really feasible. The school is planning to do up the grounds with turf and a running track, which would be a lot nicer to play on, but nothing has been done yet.



Are less active youth ready to do more physical activity?



Trigger points for youth

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

 School year transitions

 Change of school

 Going back to school/school terms

 Season/weather

 Sporting season

How should we talk to youth about being physically active?

- Highlight the recognised benefits such as socialising, skill development and feeling better.
- Introduce and reinforce the notion of fun, development and learning.
- Emphasise the opportunity to explore, relax and learn.
- It's also important to reassure and encourage them, to limit their concern about not being good at an activity.

Adapted from: Sport England 2016, *Under the skin*, Sport England, London.



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