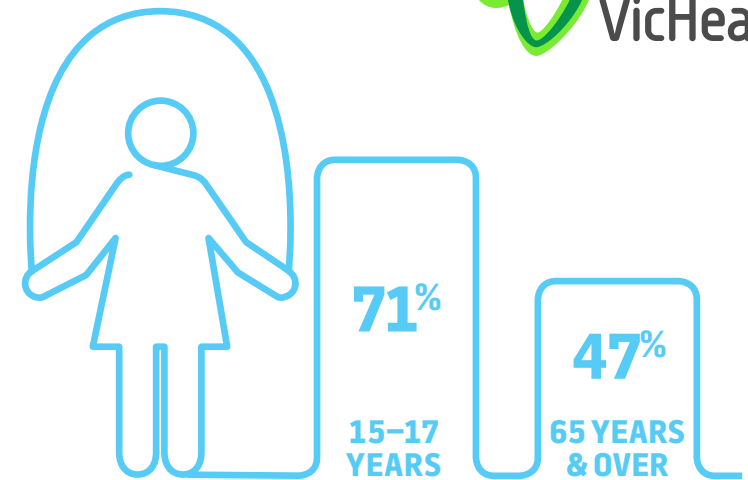


Female participation in sport & physical activity

A snapshot of the evidence

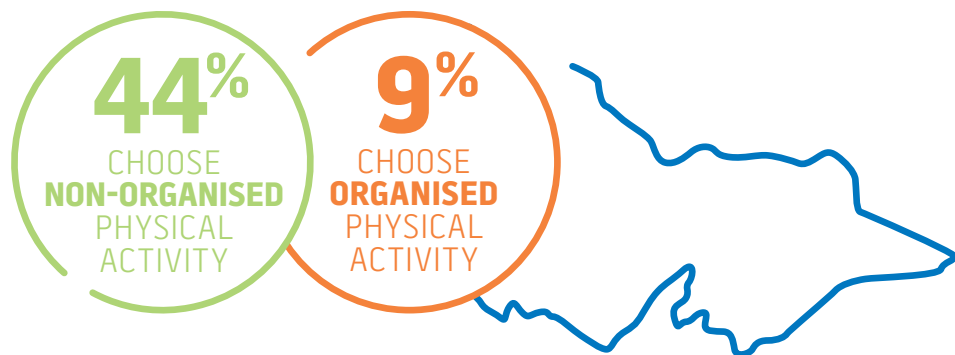
Females of all ages generally have lower physical activity participation rates than males.¹ Increasing physical activity levels for females is important for health and mental wellbeing.¹

Understanding and addressing the barriers preventing more female participation in physical activity is complex. Evidence shows that gender and the needs of females should be considered when developing specific physical activity opportunities.



Trend: Participation levels

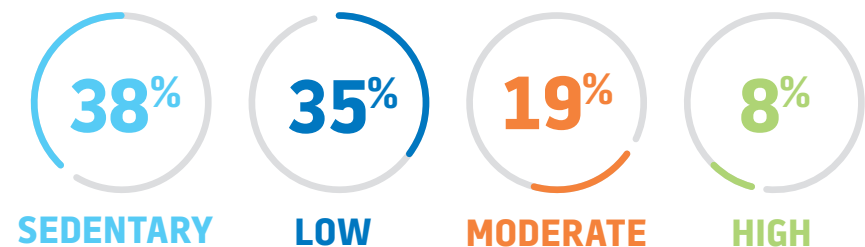
Participation in sport and active recreation by Victorian females declines as females get older.²



Trend: Non-organised/organised activity levels

In Victoria, statistics show four times as many females (44%) are choosing to participate in non-organised or more flexible physical activity offerings compared to organised physical activity (9%).³

Female participation through sporting or recreational clubs is lower compared to males.⁴



Trend: Activity levels

More than two-thirds of adult Australian females were classified as being sedentary or having low levels of exercise.¹



Health benefits of physical activity for women



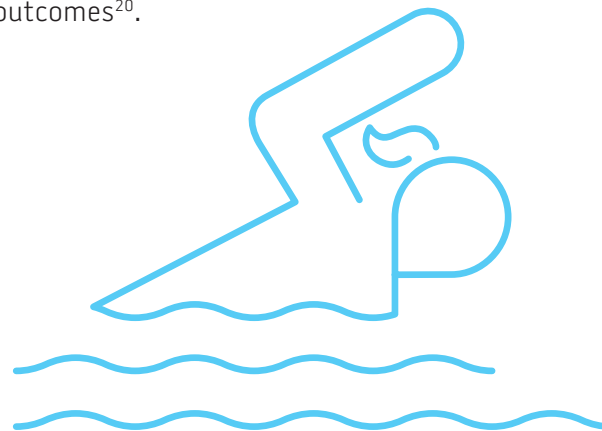
Even having a low level of physical activity is better for health than not being active at all.⁵

Participation in sport and physical activity can provide females with the following benefits:

- prevention and management of disease, such as: coronary heart disease, strokes, type 2 diabetes, Alzheimer's Disease and dementia^{6,7,8,9}
- increased health, fitness, body and bone strength^{10,11,12}
- weight loss and prevention of obesity⁷
- reduced risks of mortality⁵
- increased mental health and improved wellbeing¹³
- increase in social connections and enjoyment^{14,15}.

Motives for females to get physically active

- Compared to men, women place more importance on the social aspects of physical activity, and are less motivated by performance outcomes, such as building strength¹⁴.
- Motives to participate can change and evolve over time. For example, a woman may begin physical activity for health reasons, however find enjoyment in the social aspect or mental wellbeing and continue for those reasons^{16,17,18,19}.
- Key motivations include maintaining or improving health²⁰, appearance and weight management¹⁶, personal fulfilment¹⁶, wellbeing and improving quality of life¹⁶ and social interactions¹⁴.
- Younger women (18-35) have been found to be more motivated by appearance, weight loss and peer pressure compared to older women²¹, however conversely can be hampered by societal expectations of body image¹³.
- Older women are predominantly motivated by health outcomes²⁰.



Influencers on physical activity

- Addressing the barriers can have a greater influence on females being more active, compared to promoting the benefits of physical activity²².
- Reducing the perception of, or the actual barriers could be necessary to increase participation. The more barriers a female perceives the less likely she is to engage^{22,23,24}.
- Not all females are the same and some may experience different barriers and challenges to others. Certain barriers can affect a female more at different life stages^{13,24,25,26}.

Physical activity across life stages



Girls & adolescents

Women 18-55 years

Mothers

Older women 55+ years

Females of all ages (summation)

MOTIVATIONS

- Having fun with friends³¹
- Improving their skills⁶²
- Family activity, parents involved in physical activity²⁷
- Improve body image⁶¹

- Younger women motivated by improving their appearance and weight management²¹
- Social over performance outcomes¹⁴

- Low levels of self-motivation, as priority is on their family rather than themselves^{33, 35}
- Can be motivated by weight management³⁵ and personal wellbeing³³
- Communicating the benefits of physical activity could potentially motivate mothers, such as being a positive role model within their family³³

- Health outcomes²⁰

- Social interaction^{39, 14}

BARRIERS

- Family (parent) support:
 - logistics, transport and organisation^{26, 27, 29, 54}
 - emotional support, praise and encouragement^{26, 27, 29, 54}
 - financial^{26, 27, 29, 54}
 - peer support and encouragement⁵⁴
- Adolescents:
 - time constraints with academic activities, social activities, and paid employment^{55, 56, 60}
 - during adolescence, girls' priorities shift toward spending social time with friends, doing household chores and concentrating on school work. Physical activity becomes less of a priority during adolescence^{55, 56}
 - influenced by self-concept, confidence levels and perception of skills in comparison to peers^{54, 56, 57}
 - influenced greatly by body image and experience greater drop-out during adolescent due to social and peer pressures on appearance⁵⁶

- Time constraints and shifting responsibilities related to:
 - study
 - work
 - domestic and family duties¹³
- Perception that daily activities do not leave enough time to exercise²⁴
- Feeling tired²⁴
- Not wanting to exercise alone²⁴
- Cost and inflexibility of payment structures, and inflexible time structures¹³
- Obese women can feel their weight is a barrier to physical activity as it inhibits their energy level, confidence, and ability to participate¹⁷
- Intimidated by the gym environment¹³
- Perceived barriers for 18–55 year old women decrease as they become more active, women who are more active, perceive less barriers²⁴

- Lack of time^{25, 32, 33}
- Family support^{25, 32, 33}
- Family priority for time and money^{25, 32, 33}
- Guilt about spending time away from family and spending family resources on themselves^{25, 32, 33}
- Understanding what exercise to undertake at what stage of pregnancy^{64, 65}

- Fewer barriers than other female age groups^{20, 24}
- Understanding what exercise to undertake at what age and ability level²⁰
- Fear of injury²⁰
- Perceived lack of ability²⁰
- Existing health problems²⁴
- Long term sedentary patterns²⁰
- Perceived age barrier²⁰

- Confidence, knowledge and belief in their own ability^{20, 28, 50, 54, 56, 57}
- Lack of motivation^{18, 24}
- Time^{13, 18, 24, 25, 32, 33, 55, 56, 60}
- Finances^{18, 26, 27, 29, 54, 31, 33}
- Fatigue²⁴
- Knowledge of what physical activity to undertake^{13, 20, 65}
- Awareness and access to opportunities^{14, 42} particularly for rural areas⁵⁸
- Perceiving activities such as watching TV as more relaxing and instantly rewarding⁵⁹
- Sociocultural restraints can include:
 - perception girls/women should not participate in physical activity⁴⁰
 - language, religious wear^{40, 45}
 - previous physical activity experience^{40, 45}
 - facilities do not cater for gender segregation or food requirements^{40, 45, 46}

Continues



CONSIDERATION FOR PROGRAM DESIGN

Girls & adolescents

- Skill building through training sessions or short courses designed as ‘introduction’ to sporting activity³⁴
- Creating opportunities where adolescent girls can participate in physical activity with similar skilled peers and in gender groups or, if mixed, ensure it is a supportive environment^{54, 57, 58}
- Create activities which require little financial outlay for equipment. They can potentially borrow or hire equipment or it be provided by activity co-ordinator²⁹
- ‘Girls only’ programs will reduce peer pressure and issues related to self-image^{54, 58}
- Co-ordinate programs where girls and boys can participate in activities at same time (yet separately), reducing the time constraints and logistical barriers for parents⁵⁴
- Create activities which facilitate whole family involvement³³
- Extend awareness and education of the importance of physical activity and the potential barriers for girls to teachers, family, role models and peers so that they can support girls’ participation and reduce drop-out rates⁶⁰

Women 18-55 years

- Flexibility with cancellations and payment^{13, 14, 24}
- Locations for physical activity need to be within or close to work, study, or home^{13, 14, 24}
- Create short or express activities which can be done during lunch breaks^{13, 14, 24}
- Flexible social based, such as walking groups^{13, 14, 24}
- Include education elements to physical activity programs which include time-management skills and self-empowerment^{13, 24}

Mothers

- Child care facilities available or fun activities for children which would alleviate guilt³³
- Incorporate children into activity³³
- Unstructured and flexible activities, such as walking groups^{33, 34}
- For structured activities, having no cancellation fees and flexible payment options³⁵
- Education of suitable activities for pregnant women^{64, 65}
- Flexible hours that physical activity is available and range of physical activity activities which fit into work day⁶³
- Provide resources which support physical activities at home, such as exercise programs, health and diet information, pedometers and diaries to track activity and maintain motivation^{33, 35}
- Take a ‘whole of family’ approach to create a program children, mothers and potentially partners can all participate or be included³³

Older women 55+ years

- Scheduled routine of activities^{20, 24}
- Education on health benefits and overcoming illness^{20, 24}
- Social element^{20, 24}
- Outdoors^{20, 24}
- Consider walks around gardens^{20, 24}

Females of all ages (summation)

- Providing activities at flexible times, and creating flexible payment options^{13, 32}. Free introductory courses to increase confidence and remove cost and investment barrier^{40, 45, 46}
- Work in partnership with key target groups (cultural or religious groups)^{40, 45, 46}
- Ensure program facilitators are educated and trained on cultural sensitives or requirements^{40, 45, 46} and are focused on motivating and supporting females³²
- Create inclusive physical and cultural environments⁴⁹
- Create opportunities for non-participating women to be included, such as volunteering⁴¹



Girls & adolescents

Women 18-55 years

Mothers

Older women 55+ years

Females of all ages (summation)

PROMOTION

- Promote the benefits of girls' involvement in physical activity to parents, teachers and role models. Particularly promote the potential for stress reduction and improved study⁵⁸
- Promote the social element of programs to girls; the fun, excitement and time with friends. Consider promoting programs to whole social groups, families and schools by perhaps offering discounts to bring a friend or sister³³
- Promote the skill-building elements of the program and emphasise it is not about performance or competition⁶⁰

- Marketing should focus on the social and enjoyment benefits of the program^{13, 17, 24}
- For obese women, marketing the social enjoyment and other benefits to physical activity, as opposed to weight loss, may reduce the expectations and pressure women place on themselves¹⁷

- Communicate and educate the importance of physical activity to those within a mothers' support group (partners, family, work etc.) to encourage their support, both logistical (such as looking after children) and emotional^{23, 25, 33}
- Include easy-to-read health information about what activities are safe at what stage of pregnancy and motherhood^{33, 35}
- Communicate health education and physical activity messages during the program by SMS and phone rather than rely on personal contact^{33, 35, 36}

- Promote and educate the benefits of short or low impact physical activity (such as walking or gardening)²²
- Promote relevant and timely information specific to this group with consideration for overcoming illness or health concerns^{20, 24}
- Promote the social element and a scheduled routine^{20, 24}
- Promote the accessibility of the physical activity and ensure participants' activities will be achievable for their age group and ability¹³

- Throughout promotion material use 'real' images that females can relate to and 'see themselves' doing. This improves their self-concept and gives them a belief they can do the activity⁵⁰
- Extend this to include diverse images of religious or cultural groups, particularly for cultures where religious headwear is necessary and female only areas^{40, 45, 46}

Summary: When designing and promoting your program

Do

- Consider partnering with other community groups who access your target market or can provide physical activity in locations and settings close to work, school or home.
- Include your target market in the creation of programs to give them a sense of control and involvement. This will also allow you to identify particular motives or barriers that need to be addressed.
- Consider the particular barriers your target market faces, and design and promote a program that can overcome these^{13, 24, 25, 26}.
- Consider the motivations of your target group and promote details of how you will deliver on these motivations through your activity.
- Educate and make aware of the opportunities of the most appropriate physical activity for your target group^{13, 14, 65}
- Include general information on how to live a healthy lifestyle. For example: dietary requirements, healthy eating and opportunities of how to fit physical activity into a person's daily routine.
- Design programs which build skills.
- Use images which are easily relatable to your target market.

Don't

- Don't discriminate based on gender. Girls and women can be interested in all types of PA.
- Do not focus only on the participants. Educating families (parents, partners, extended family) and role models (teachers, peers, cultural and religious leaders) about the benefits and necessities of female physical activity could increase their level of support for girls and women participating^{29, 40, 41, 45, 46, 60}.
- Do not limit accessibility to physical activity activities. If location, time or transport is a barrier, design programs which could be delivered in a work or school setting, or outside.
- Do not focus only on weight-related benefits; women can get disheartened if their weight-loss goals are not quickly achieved. Instead consider and promote the social, mental and wellbeing benefits of physical activity as well as the wider health benefits¹⁷.
- Do not limit your innovation. Consider technology to improve monitoring (e.g. pedometers) and communication tools to reach and keep in contact with females (mobile phone SMS, email, mail out programs and information, phone calls).

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