

“It makes me generally feel better after activities and provides me with a chance to stop thinking for a while.”

—Mother from regional Victoria



# 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](http://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.

### Parents’ activity levels



‘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.

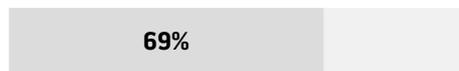
### Victorian mums and dads:



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:

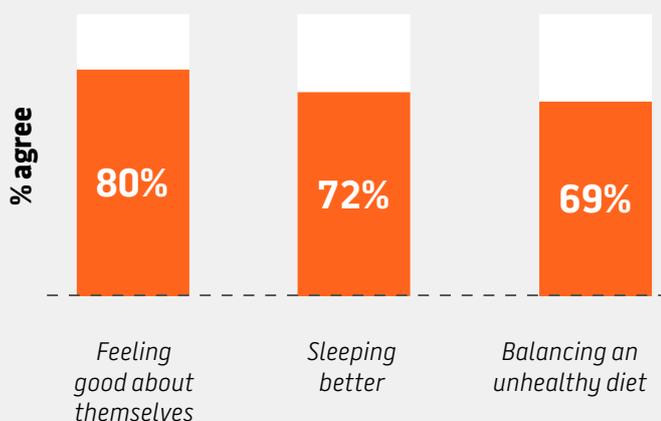
**3%** are inactive mums

**2%** are inactive dads

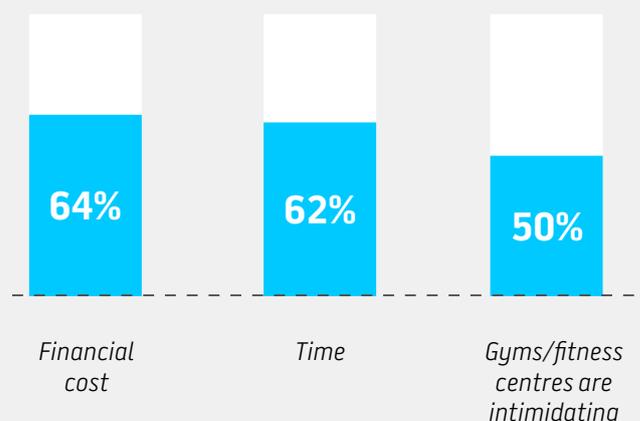
**6%** are somewhat active mums

**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.

## Mums' activity levels

**INACTIVE**  
**20%**

**SOMEWHAT ACTIVE**  
**38%**

**ACTIVE**  
**43%**

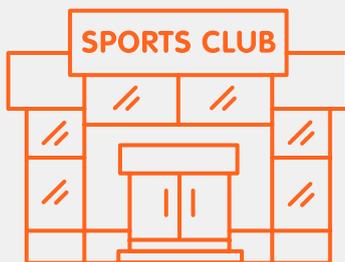
'Inactive' = no days of 30-minute sessions of physical activity per week; 'Somewhat active' = 1 to 3 days of 30-minute sessions per week; 'Active' = 4+ days of 30-minute sessions per week.



## Meet Lorna, *an inactive mum*

**L**orna 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.

**L**orna 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.



**J**oining 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.

**L**orna 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.



**S**he 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

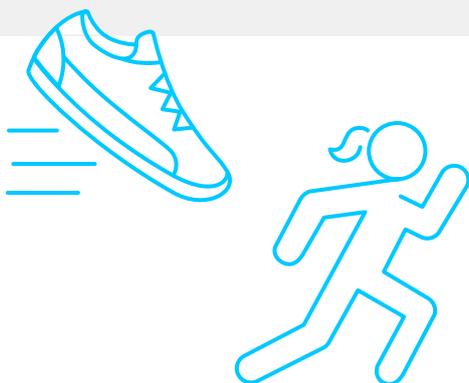
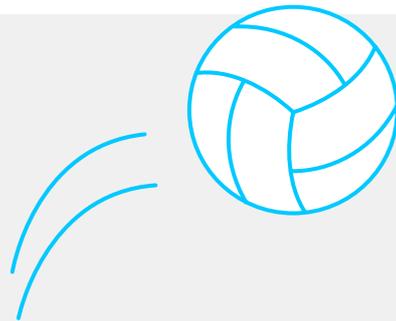


**F**aridah is Lorna's neighbour. Her children are now 12 and 14 years old, which means they're more independent and can walk to and from school on their own.



**F**aridah 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.

**F**aridah'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.

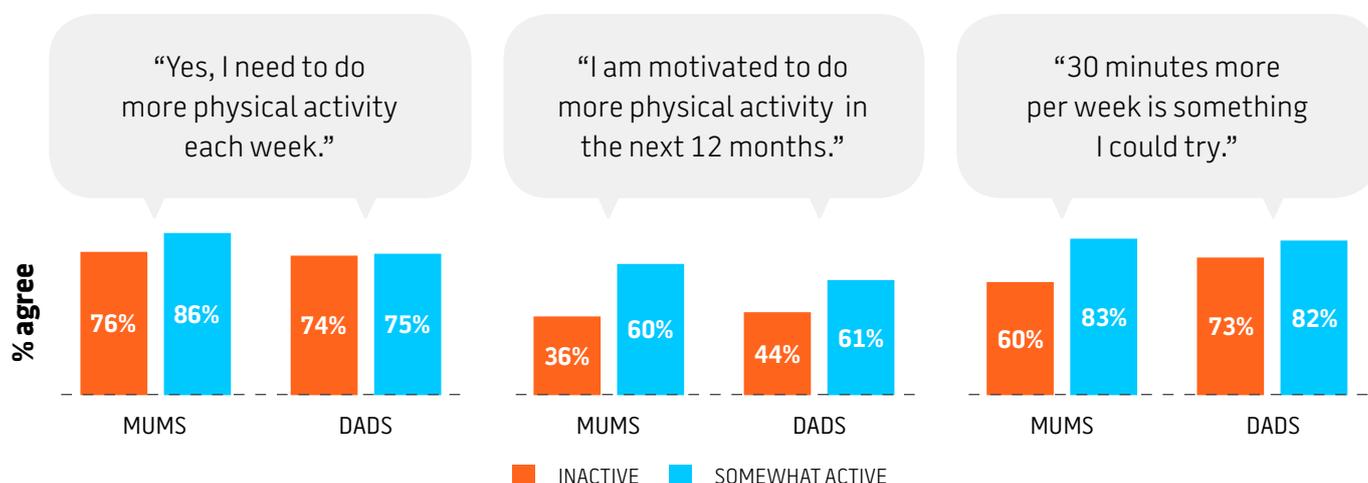


**H**aving said that, Faridah wants to have a bit more physical activity in her normal routine, as the swimming and occasional run make her feel good about herself and she feels sharper and sleeps better after being active. Her children are in their school's cross-country teams and this also motivates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

**L**ike 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!



# 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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