

“Life has slowed down a bit after having kids – you need to force yourself to do it.”

– Female, Melbourne



Retirees

Physical activity insights

For many, retirement is a time of new-found freedom. Those who are newly retired experience a sense of reward and entitlement to ‘down tools’, relax and enjoy life. While many embrace the lack of structure or pressure in their day, this life stage can coincide with new responsibilities of caring for ageing parents and the arrival of grandchildren.

Retirees are highly conscious of their mortality and very aware of their diminishing physical health and abilities. They also:

- have lower activity levels than other life stages, and the highest incidence of inactivity (27%)
- participate in a smaller repertoire of activities, primarily due to physical health and ability levels
- are least likely of all life stages to be doing more activity now compared to a year ago (20%), though more retired women have increased their activity over the last year than men (26% vs 13%).

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

Only one in ten retirees (9%) is involved in sport on a weekly basis (primarily club-based competitive and non-competitive sport). Given the declining physical abilities of retirees, the range of sports available to them is limited.

However, retirees are more likely than other life stages to think that physical activity around the house or garden counts as exercise, and still think it’s exercise even if you’re not puffing and sweating.

Retirees’ 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.

AMONG ALL VICTORIAN ADULTS:

3% are **inactive** retired women

2% are **inactive** retired men

4% are **somewhat active** retired women

3% are **somewhat active** retired men

A significant benefit of physical activity for retirees is social connection with other individuals, as well as engagement with the broader community. Equally, having the encouragement of others to exercise with can be important in helping retirees to continue or get back into physical activity.

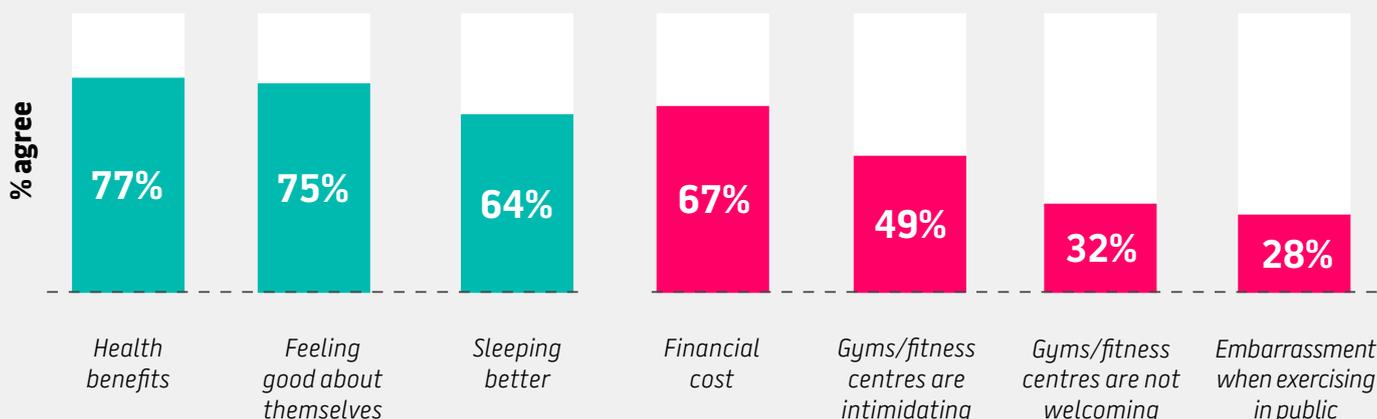
The ‘lived experience’ of the health benefits of physical activity has a new relevance to more active retirees, and those who are inactive are significantly less likely to appreciate these benefits. Health issues and illness can also shatter retirees’ confidence and will to participate in physical activity.

While time is not as much of a barrier to participation for retirees compared with other life stages, for some there is strong resistance to being locked in to set times and a routine, and a desire to be able to change plans without guilt.

Retirees’ physical activity is particularly influenced by their local neighbourhood – many walk for exercise, and are not keen to walk on rough, uneven paths. This can be more of an issue in regional and rural areas.

Perceived benefits of physical activity for retirees

Barriers to physical activity for retirees



Focus on retired women

Strong social benefit

Retired women in particular, see a strong social benefit to physical activity.

A way to manage my weight

Retirees see physical activity as a way to manage their weight, which women relate to their appearance, dress size and mobility.

Feel embarrassed exercising in public

Many retired women feel embarrassed exercising in public and are uncomfortable in exercise clothes.

Easier to exercise with someone else

Women in this life stage are more likely than to men think that it's easier to exercise with someone else than on your own (60% of women agree, compared to 46% of men).

Find sports clubs and gyms intimidating

Retired women (particularly inactive women) often find sports clubs, gyms and fitness centres intimidating. This intimidation and embarrassment relates to both the way they look and their ability when they compare themselves to younger people.

Retired women's activity levels



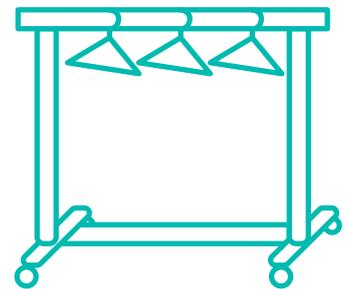
'Inactive' = no days of 30-minute sessions of physical activity per week; 'Somewhat active' = 1 to 3 days of 30-minute sessions per week; 'Active' = 4+ days of 30-minute sessions per week.



Meet Carol, *an inactive retiree*

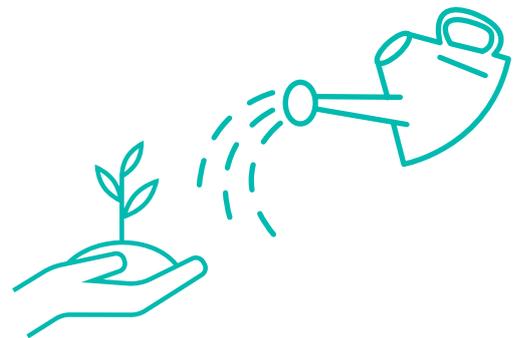
Carol, 70, is a retiree living on her own in regional Victoria in the house she grew up in.

Carol worked as an administrator at the local MP's office until an illness forced an early retirement. These days she spends some of her time as a volunteer in the local op shop or in the nearby refugee house where she teaches English. She likes to keep busy, and to feel independent as well as useful and connected to her community.



Having lived in the area all her life, Carol knows most of her neighbours and loves to stop for a chat when she's out doing errands. Carol used to walk around the local neighbourhood to visit friends but is becoming more wary of the rough, uneven paths and usually prefers to drive.

Since her illness, Carol is no longer able to exercise for longer periods as she gets out of breath. She prefers to spend her spare time reading or pottering around the garden.

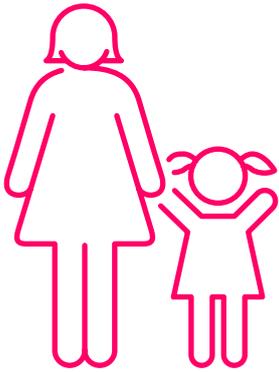


Carol wants to sell the family home and move somewhere smaller that would be easier for her to maintain. As she gets older, she thinks it may be better to live closer to her sister but leaving the area would be a big adjustment.

Meet Denise, *a somewhat active retiree*

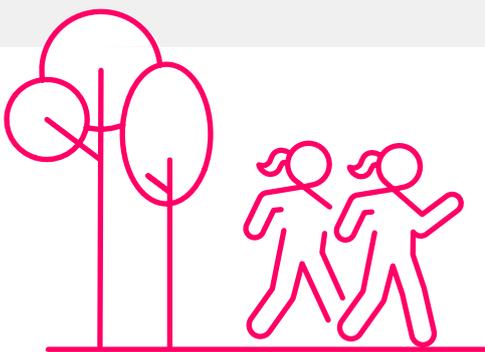
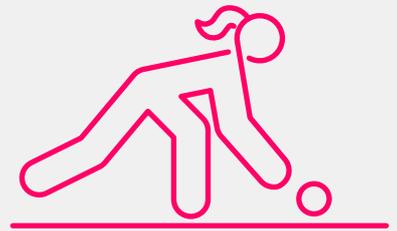


Carol's sister Denise, 67, is also retired. Denise is married, lives in Melbourne and is awaiting the arrival of her second grandchild in a few months.



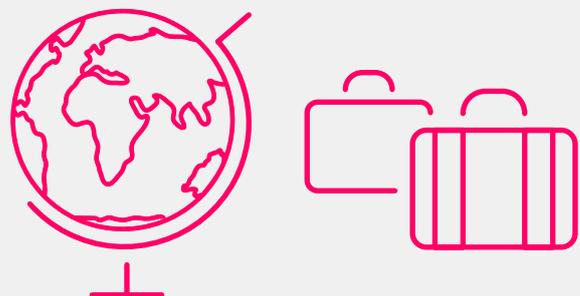
Denise retired from full-time primary school teaching only a couple of years ago and is enjoying her new found freedom and 'entitlement' to relaxation, without a rigid structure to her week. The only days that she has a regular commitment are Monday and Wednesday to look after her grandson when her daughter goes to a part-time job.

As a former teacher, Denise feels like she has led a fairly active life but she has never taken part in regular exercise or sport. Since retiring, she has started thinking more about physical activity, particularly for the health benefits and staying mobile. She joined her friends at the bowls club but decided not to be part of their regular team as she likes being free to help with her grandson at short notice if needed.

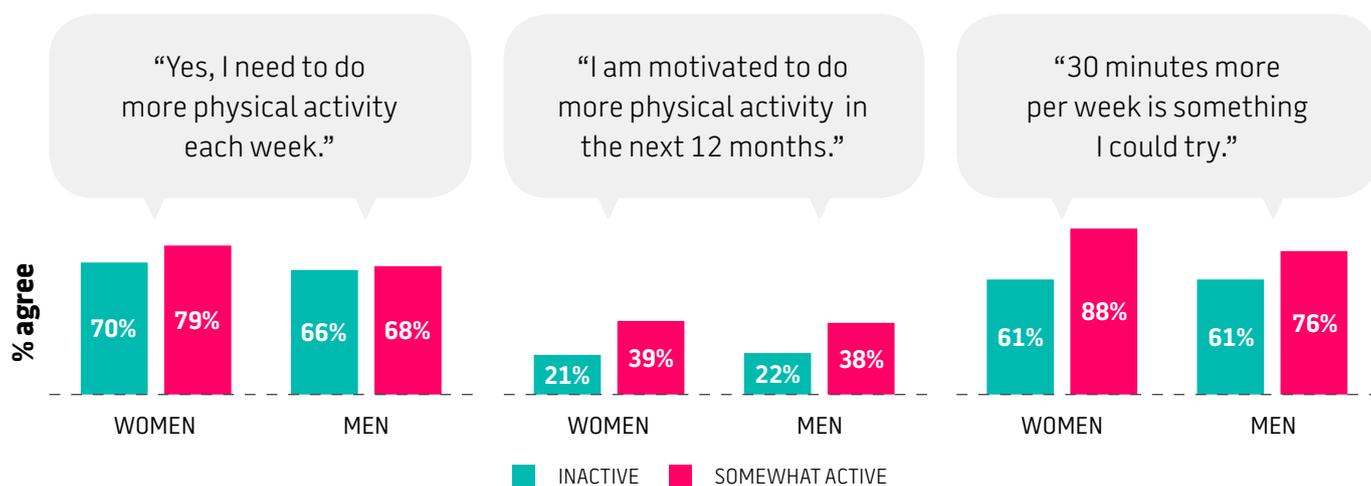


Denise and her husband go for a walk most evenings, as long as it's not raining. Once a week she meets up with a friend and they walk a 45-minute circuit around the parklands before going for lunch. She tried swimming during the summer but found the pool was too crowded and she felt embarrassed at being surrounded by younger people who might think her too slow.

On some days, Denise and her husband catch up with a neighbour to practise their Spanish, a language they had been trying to learn while they save up for a trip to Spain.



Are less active retirees ready to do more physical activity?



Trigger points for retirees

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



Start of retirement



Birth of grandchildren



Moving house/downsizing



Injury



Bereavement



Season/weather

How should we talk to retirees about being physically active?

- Raise awareness of ways to be active within more limited ability, as well as what's available locally.
- Be motivating and encouraging.
- Highlight the recognised benefits – particularly health benefits, weight management and mobility.
- Promote the social benefits, including engagement with the broader community.

Less than half of inactive Victorian retirees (46% of women and 42% of men) are daily social media users.



VicHealth acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.

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January 2017 P-PA-463-5

