



The Relationship of Physical Activity and Health



Key Points

- Physical activity has numerous health benefits that will help reduce the occurrence of many physical and emotional illnesses and disease.
- Despite numerous health-related benefits, an extremely low percentage of the United States population participates in regular physical activity.
- Only 22% of the population receives the suggested amount of physical activity, while 78% of the population does not receive an adequate amount of physical activity.

There are numerous health-related benefits that can result from participating in moderate to vigorous physical activity. However, despite numerous health-related benefits, an extremely low percentage of the United States population participates in regular physical activity. Only 22% of the population receives the suggested amount of physical activity, while 78% of the population does not receive an adequate amount of physical activity. [\(1\)](#) Of the United States population, 25% leads completely sedentary lifestyles. [\(1\)](#) Sedentary lifestyles have been directly correlated with many health-related illnesses and diseases, but the most common is the occurrence of depression and symptoms of depression. [\(2\)](#)

It is highly recommended that the individuals that do not receive enough physical activity start participating in physical activity immediately. Unfortunately, much of the population does not follow this recommendation from doctors and health specialists. In a study researching exercise counseling in older women, 31.4% of women aged 50 to 64 years were recommended to participate in physical activity by medical doctors, but they never acted on those recommendations.

Also, 29.2% of women aged 65 to 74, 21.6% for women aged 75-84, and 14.4% for women aged 85 and older were recommended to participate in regular physical activity but never participated in any type of physical activity. (3) This is reflective towards today's society attitude about physical activity; even though doctors are prescribing active lifestyles, people are ignoring those recommendations.

Exercise Adherence

Every year, many individuals vow to lead a healthier lifestyle and become increasingly physically active to improve their overall health. Unfortunately, the majority of people that start an exercise and physical activity program are likely to drop out within the first six months of that program. It is recommended that individuals participate in an activity that they enjoy, since people that participate in activities that they do not like are likely to drop out of that program. The drop out rates in physical activity and exercise programs are disturbingly high. It was found that individuals who have been single their whole life, uneducated, and either underweight or overweight are most likely to completely drop out of any type of physical activity or exercise program. (4) As previously mentioned, it is highly suggested that the activities that are being participated in must be enjoyable for the individual. If the activities are not enjoyable, it is likely that the individual will drop out and not continue to participate in any physical activity.

Exercise Recommendations

There are specific recommendations for the amount of physical activity adults, children, and the elderly population should be receiving. Adults should engage themselves in moderate-intensity physical activity for at least 30 minutes 5 or more days out of the week. Also, adults can participate in vigorous-intensity physical activity for at least 20 minutes 3 or more days out of the week. It is recommended that children and adolescents participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity most days of the week. For the elderly population, it is recommended that they participate in moderate-intensity aerobic activity for 30 minutes 3 to 5 days a week, stretch every day, and participate in strength-building activities 2 to 3 times per week. (5)

Did You know?

In the United States, 43.2% of the population that participates in physical activity walks for exercise, 28.1% gardens or conducts some type of yard work, 27.2% participates in daily stretching exercises, 15.5% participates in weightlifting or strength training, 12.3% rides a bicycle or exercise bike, 10.6% jogs or runs, 6.6% climbs stairs for exercise, 6.3% participates in aerobics or aerobic dancing, 5.9% plays basketball, 5.6% swims, 4.9% plays golf, 3.2% participates in bowling or bowling leagues, 2.9% plays baseball or softball, 1.7% plays tennis, 1.7% plays volleyball, 1.5% plays football, 1.4% plays soccer, 0.8% plays racquetball, 0.5% participated in downhill skiing, 0.3% participated in water skiing, and 0.2% participates in cross-country skiing. (5)

With so many viable options for participating in physical activity, there are no reasons for such an overwhelmingly large disparity in the percentage of the population that receives an adequate amount of physical activity, and those who do not receive an adequate amount of physical activity. Even though the overall health of our society is improving, the population will not reach an optimal level of health without an increase in the participation in physical activity. Physical activity has numerous health benefits that will help reduce the occurrence of many physical and emotional illnesses and disease.

References

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- (3) [Schonberg M. Receipt of exercise counseling. J Amer Geriatrics Soc 2006;54\(4\):619-626.](#)
- (4) [Stiggelbout M, Hopman M, Tak E. Dropout from exercise programs for seniors. J Aging Phys Act 2005;13\(4\):409-421.](#)
- (5) Powers S, Howley E. Exercise physiology: Theory and application to fitness and performance. New York, NY: McGraw Hill; 2004.