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Physical Activity Survey, 2006

April 2006



Physical Activity Survey, 2006

Data Collected by International Communications Research
Report Prepared by Teresa A. Keenan, Ph.D.

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AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that helps people 50+ have independence, choice, and control in ways that are beneficial and affordable to them and society as a whole. We produce *AARP The Magazine*, published bimonthly; *AARP Bulletin*, our monthly newspaper; *AARP Segunda Juventud*, our bimonthly magazine in Spanish and English; *NRTA Live and Learn*, our quarterly newsletter for 50+ educators; and our web site, www.aarp.org. AARP Foundation is an affiliated charity that provides security, protection, and empowerment to older persons in need with support from thousands of volunteers, donors, and sponsors. We have staffed offices in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Acknowledgements

This study was conducted for the *AARP Bulletin*. International Communications Research, Inc. collected and tabulated the data. For additional information contact the author, Teresa A. Keenan, at (202)-434-6274.

Background

The purpose of this study was to gather opinions from individuals 18 years and older about physical activity and exercise for the *AARP Bulletin*. Questions were included on an omnibus survey that was fielded March 29 through April 3, 2006 by International Communications Research (ICR). This omnibus survey is a bi-weekly national telephone survey of U.S. households. The survey was conducted among 1,011 respondents 18 years of age and older, with responses weighted to be representative of the U.S. 18+ population. The margin of error is +/- three percent at the 95% confidence level.

Initially respondents were asked about their current level of physical activity. Those who reported being active on a regular basis for at least six months were asked follow-up questions about the amount of physical activity they do, the perceived benefits of exercise, their preferred type of exercise, and whether they have always been as active as they report being now. Those who reported not engaging in any physical activity or who reported thinking about starting an exercise regimen in the near future were asked the reasons why they currently don't exercise.

Key Findings

- Respondents are an active bunch, with nearly half reporting having been physically active for a year or longer, while roughly one-fifth said they have been so for the past six months. In contrast, nearly three in ten noted that they don't currently engage in physical activity or are planning to start within the next six months.
- Improving their overall health and feeling good about themselves are the top reasons noted for exercise, mentioned by nine out of ten active respondents. Three-fourths of active respondents said they exercise to reduce stress or to control their weight, while slightly more than half said they do so to fight aging. Four in ten respondents said they exercise as a way of socializing with others.
- The favorite type of exercise among this sample of respondents is walking, noted by more than one-third of those who are active. All other types of exercises were mentioned by less than ten percent of active respondents as their "favorite" type.
- Respondents who reported being active were about evenly split between those who said they have always exercised the same amount as they do now and those who said they started exercising more at some point as they got older.

- Roughly one-quarter of active respondents who said they started exercising more as they aged reported doing so because they wanted to lose weight. Somewhat fewer said they started exercising because they know exercise is good for them or because they have a health condition that is improved with exercise.
- Among those respondents who said they were not currently active or who were planning to be more active in the next few months, nearly six in ten said they don't exercise because they feel tired or lack energy. Half said they don't have enough time, and roughly four in ten said bad weather hinders their exercise routine.
- When respondents were asked if they had ever overestimated the amount of time they exercise when asked by their doctor, fewer than one in ten (9%) reported having done so.

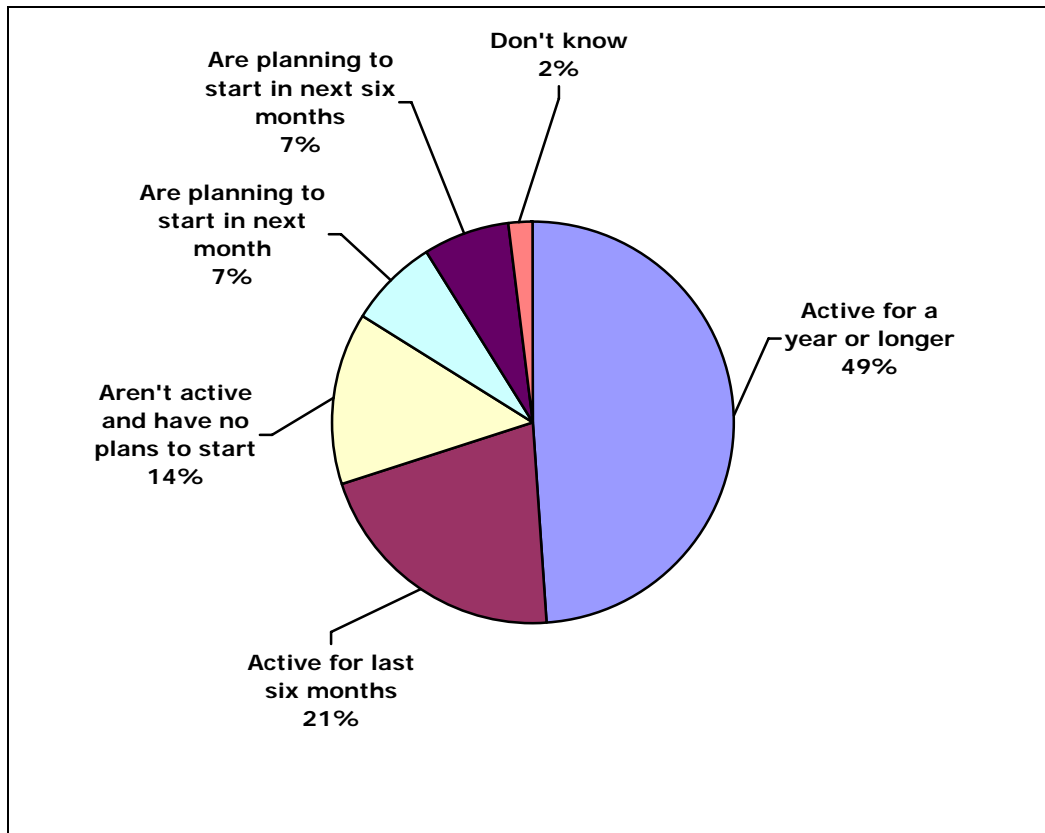
Detailed Findings

Current Level of Physical Activity

Nearly half (49%) of the respondents reported having been physically active for a year or longer, while roughly one-fifth (21%) said they have been so for the past six months (see Figure 1). Nearly three in ten respondents said that they don't currently engage in physical activity (14%) or are planning to start, either in the next month (7%) or in the next six months (7%).

- When they were asked about their current levels of physical activity, women are more likely than men to say they are either planning to become active in the next month (10% vs. 4%) or have been regularly active for the past six months (27% vs. 13%). In contrast, men are more likely than women to say they have been physically active on a regular basis for a year or longer (63% vs. 36%).
- When looking at age differences, older respondents—those aged 45 or older—are more likely than respondents who are younger than age 45 to say they don't currently engage in regular physical activity (15% for those 45-54, 23% for those 55-64, and 33% for those 65+ vs. 4% for those 18-34 and 10% for those 35-44).
- When considering annual household income, respondents with incomes less than \$25,000 are more likely than more affluent respondents to say they don't engage in regular physical activity (21% vs. 7% for those with incomes of \$75,000 or more). On the other end of the income spectrum, respondents with annual household incomes of either \$25,000 to \$49,999 or \$75,000 or more are more likely than those with incomes less than \$25,000 to say they have been physically active on a regular basis for a year or longer (51% and 60% vs. 35%).

Figure 1
How physically active are you?
(n=1,011)



Source: *Physical Activity Survey, 2006*, April 2006

Amount of Exercise

Of those who report being physically active, more than six in ten (61%) said that they accumulate four hours or more per week of physical activity. Another quarter (24%) said they accumulate between two and four hours per week, while roughly one in seven said they accumulate between one-half hour to two hours (12%) or less than one-half hour (2%) of physical activity per week.

- Women are more likely than men to say they accumulate either between one-half hour and two hours (18% vs. 7%) or between two and four hours (29% vs. 20%) of physical activity in one week. Men are more likely than women to report being active for four hours or more per week (71% vs. 50%). Notably, there are no age or income differences in respondents' reported amount of physical activity.

Perceived Benefits of Exercise

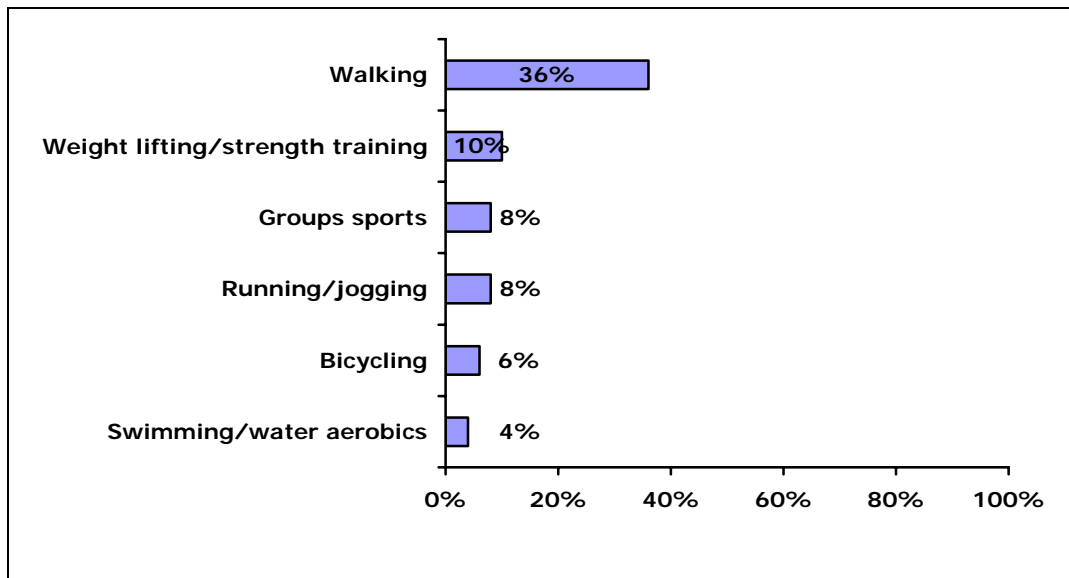
Improving their overall health (94%) and feeling good about themselves (92%) are the top reasons noted for exercise, mentioned by nine out of ten active respondents. Three-fourths of active respondents said they exercise to reduce stress (77%) or to control their weight (77%), while slightly more than half (54%) said they do so to fight aging. Four in ten (40%) said they exercise as a way of socializing with others.

- In terms of the six benefits of exercise they were asked about, active women are more likely than active men to say they exercise to improve their overall health (97% vs. 91%) or to control their weight (83% vs. 71%). Men, in contrast, are more likely to say they exercise as a means of socializing with other people (46% vs. 34%). There are no age or income differences in terms of the benefits.

Preferred Type of Exercise

The favorite type of exercise is walking, noted by more than one-third (36%) of the active respondents. All other types of exercises were mentioned by less than ten percent of active respondents as their “favorite” type (see Figure 2).

Figure 2
What is your favorite type of exercise?
(n=698)



Source: *Physical Activity Survey, 2006*, April 2006

- Men are more likely than women to say their favorite type of exercise is a group sport (11% vs. 4%), running/jogging (12% vs. 3%), or weight lifting/strength training (16% vs. 4%). In contrast, women are more likely than men to cite walking (49% vs. 25%) as their preferred type of exercise.
- Perhaps not surprisingly, younger respondents are more likely to say their favorite exercise is running/jogging (15% for those 18-34 vs. 1% for those 65+), while older respondents are more likely to say they prefer walking (37% for those 35-44, 45% for those 45-54, 55% for those 55-64, and 43% for those 65+ vs. 22% for those 18-34).

Physical Activity over a Lifetime

Respondents who reported being active were about evenly split between those who said they have always exercised the same amount as they do now (47%) and those who said they started exercising more at some point as they got older (48%). Five percent said they did not know.

Further, among those active respondents who said they started exercising more as they aged, one-quarter (24%) said they did so because they wanted to lose weight. Roughly one in six active respondents said they started exercising because they know exercise is good for you (17%) or because they have a health condition that is improved with exercise (17%). Fewer than one in ten said they exercised because something happened in their life to motivate them (7%), they heard information about the benefits of exercise (6%), their doctor suggested it because of a health condition (5%), or a friend or family member suggested it (1%).

- When active respondents were asked if they exercise the same amount now as they always have, or if they started exercising more as they got older, respondents aged 65+ said they have always exercised the same amount (66% vs. 41% for those 18-34 and 34-44 and 48% for those 45-54), while respondents younger than 45 say they have started exercising more at some point as they have gotten older (53% for those 18-34 and 54% for those 35-44 vs. 30% for those 65+). Notably, there are no gender or income differences in responses to this question.
- The only statistically significant difference in the reasons respondents gave for starting to exercise more as they aged is that women are more likely than men (31% vs. 17%) to say they did so to lose weight.

Reasons for Not Exercising

Among those respondents who said they were not currently active or who were planning to be more active in the next few months, nearly six in ten (58%) said they don't exercise because they feel tired or lack energy. Half (50%) said they don't have enough time, and roughly four in ten (41%) said bad weather hinders their exercise routine. One-fifth (or fewer) inactive respondents said they don't exercise because they are afraid of getting hurt (20%), they don't have sidewalks or streets to walk or bike on (17%), or they feel self-conscious when exercising (17%).

- Inactive respondents age 55-64 are more likely than those 65 years of age and older (73% vs. 33%) to say they don't exercise because they feel tired or lack energy to do so. Moreover, respondents less than 55 years of age are more likely than those aged 65 and older to say they don't have enough time to exercise (68% for those 18-34, 70% for those 35-44, and 53% for those 45-54 vs. 22% for those 65+).
- There are also income differences for two of the six barriers to exercise, with those inactive respondents with annual household incomes less than \$25,000 more likely than those with incomes between \$50,000 and \$74,999 to say they are afraid of getting hurt (32% vs. 3%). Additionally, inactive respondents with incomes above \$25,000 are more likely than those with incomes below that figure to say they don't have enough time to exercise (65%, 77% and 70% vs. 28%).

Estimated Exercise When Asked By Doctor

All respondents were asked if they had ever overestimated the amount of time they exercise by asked by their doctor. Less than one in ten (9%) reported having done so.

- There are no demographic differences in respondents' likelihood to say they have overestimated (or not overestimated) the amount of exercise they get when asked by their doctor.

Conclusions

Respondents in this survey are a fairly active group, with nearly half saying they have been physically active for a year or longer. They exercise to improve their health, feel good about themselves, reduce stress, and control their weight. Not surprisingly, women and men note different reasons for exercising, with women saying they do so for health and weight reasons. Men, on the other hand, exercise as a way of socializing with others. Women also report walking as their preferred type of exercise, while men note group sports such as basketball, racquetball, and soccer.

Annotated Questionnaire
Physical Activity Survey Conducted for AARP Bulletin
March 29—April 3, 2006
(n=1011)

Question 1: What would you say is your current level of physical activity? Would you say...?

You don't currently engage in regular physical activity.	14%
You don't right now, but plan to start in the next six months.	7%
You don't right now, but plan to start in the next month.	7%
You've been physically active on a regular basis for the past six months.	21%
You've been physically active on a regular basis for a year or longer.	49%

[Asked of those who said they have been active on a regular basis in Question 1; n=698]

Question 2: Please estimate how much physical activity you accumulate in one week. Do you accumulate...?

Less than one-half hour	2%
Between one-half hour and two hours	12%
Between two hours and four hours	24%
Four hours or more	61%

[Asked of those who said they have been active on a regular basis in Question 1; n=698]

Question 3: I'm going to read a list of benefits people say they get from exercise. For each, please tell me if this is a reason for you or not a reason for your exercising.

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Feeling good about yourself	92%	8%
Fighting aging	54%	44%
Improving your overall health	94%	6%
Socializing with other people	40%	59%
Reducing stress	77%	22%
Controlling your weight	77%	22%

[Asked of those who are not currently physically active; n=292]

Question 4: I'm going to read you a list of reasons that people often give for not exercising. Please tell me for each one, whether it is a major reason for you or not a reason for your not exercising.

	<u>Major Reason</u>	<u>Not a Reason</u>
I don't have enough time	50%	50%
I'm afraid of getting hurt	20%	80%
Bad weather	41%	59%
I don't have sidewalks or streets to walk or bike on	17%	83%
I feel self-conscious	17%	83%
I feel tired or lack energy	58%	42%

[Asked of those who said they have been active on a regular basis in Question 1; n=698]

Question 5: What is your favorite type of exercise? [Do not read list; Accept one response]

Bicycling	6%
Dancing	1%
Elliptical machine / stair climber	3%
Golfing	1%
Group sports (ie., baseball, soccer, basketball)	8%
Hiking	3%
Pilates	1%
Running / jogging	8%
Stretching	-----
Swimming / water aerobics	4%
Tennis	1%
Walking	36%
Weight lifting / strength training	10%
Yoga	1%
Other	17%

[Asked of those who said they have been active on a regular basis in Question 1; n=698]

Question 6: Have you always exercised the same amount as you do now, or did you start exercising more, or at all, at a particular time?

I've always exercised the same amount as I do now	47%
I started exercising more at some point as I got older	48%
I don't know	5%

[Asked of those who said they have been active on a regular basis in Question 1 and who have started to exercise more as they got older; n=317]

Question 6A: What caused you to start exercising more (or to start exercising)? [Do not read list; Accept one response]

I heard information about the benefits of exercise	6%
I know it's good for you	17%
I wanted to lose weight	24%
I have a health condition that is improved with exercise	17%
A friend or family member suggested it to me	1%
My doctor suggested it because of a health condition	5%
Something happened in my life to motivate me	7%
(I don't know)	4%

Question 7: Have you ever overestimated the amount of exercise you get when asked by your doctor?

Yes	9%
No	88%
(I don't know)	2%