

Physical Activity

Summary of Significant Trends:

Why physical activity is important:

Physical activity helps to enhance the quality of life for people of all ages and abilities. Sedentary individuals can substantially reduce the risk of developing heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, and colon cancer just by becoming moderately physically active on most days of the week.¹ Physical activity helps build a healthier body by strengthening bones, muscles, and joints; aids in reducing depression and anxiety; and enhances the immune response system. Physical activity can reduce falls among the elderly by improving balance and strength as well as help relieve the pain of arthritis.

Children also benefit from physical activity. Physical inactivity is one of the causes of the childhood overweight epidemic in NC and the nation. A strong predictor of activity level as an adult is being active throughout childhood. Children are forming health-related habits that will remain through their life. Thus, it is essential to encourage youth to establish good physical activity habits.²

Defining the burden:

North Carolina faces several significant health challenges: over half of the state's residents are either overweight or obese;³ one in every four North Carolinians has some form of cardiovascular disease; and the prevalence of diabetes has increased 42 percent since 1995. Physical inactivity is a major behavioral risk factor for these and other chronic disabling diseases. A preliminary cost analysis of physical inactivity revealed that the annual cost of physical inactivity for North Carolina is approximately \$6.2 billion.⁴

In North Carolina, adult participation in physical activity is below the already low national

average. In 2000, only 18 percent of adults reported participating in regular and sustained physical activity (30 minutes of physical activity at least five times per week). This means that 82 percent of adults were not achieving the recommended level of physical activity.⁵

North Carolina youth are not getting enough physical activity to ensure their health. Only 68 percent of high school student participated in regular physical activity. Another 21 percent engaged in some physical activity (but not enough to be considered regular) and 11 percent did not engage in any physical activity.⁶ Participation in all forms of physical activity declines dramatically as youths mature.¹ Physical activity levels among North Carolina student decreases between the 9th and 12th grades.⁶

Emerging Trends and Issues:

The physical activity level of adults and children in North Carolina is below the national average. In fact, we are one of the worst states with respect to physical inactivity. This trend of inactivity is one that NC has seen for many years. The percentage of North Carolina adults engaging in regular and sustained physical activity has been below 20 percent since 1987.

Consider the following facts:

- 82 percent of NC adults do not engage in regular and sustained physical activity³
- 24 percent of high school students and 46 percent of middle school students report participation in regular, moderate physical activity⁶
- 64 percent of high school students and 48 percent of middle school student reported participation in vigorous physical activity⁶
- 6 percent of high school student and 12 percent of middle school students walk or bike to school at least once a week⁶

- 34 percent of senior citizens get the recommended amount of physical activity³
- 39 percent of residents report that their neighborhood has sidewalks⁸
- 24 percent of NC workers report that their work sites have facilities or equipment to use for physical activity¹
- 34 percent of high school students participate in daily physical education⁶

Relevance of Trends to County Programs:

Behavioral and lifestyle changes such as introducing more physical activity into one's daily routine do not happen easily. Addressing the trends of physical inactivity in NC will take communities, schools, and families working together to find meaningful solutions. The Eat Smart, Move More...North Carolina⁸ goals outline how we can begin to address this issue:

1. Increase public awareness of the importance of physical activity and the need for supportive policies and environments.
2. Increase opportunities for physical activity by fostering supportive policies and environments.

References:

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2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (1997). *Guidelines for school and community programs to promote lifelong physical activity among young people*. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR): Recommendations and Reports 48 (RR-6) (March 7): 1-36. Atlanta, GA: Public Health Services, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
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3. North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics (NC BRFSS). (2000). *North Carolina Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System*. North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health. Raleigh, NC. www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/healthstats/brfss/index.html
4. Health Management Associates. (2001). a financial cost appraisal of physical inactivity in the state of NC.
5. US Department of Health and Human Services (US DHH). (2000). *Healthy People 2010: Understanding and Improving Health*. 2nd ed. Washington, DC: U.S. www.health.gov/healthypeople
6. North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NC YRBSS). (2001). *North Carolina Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System*. www.nchealthyschools.org/nchealthyschools/htdocs/schooldata.htm
7. NC Six County Cardiovascular Health Survey. (2000).
8. NC DHHS. (2002). North Carolina blueprint for changing policies and environments in support of physical activity.
www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/whatisesmmnc/index.htm

Sources of Supporting Data:

- www.cdc.gov - centers for disease control
www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/
NC center for health statistics
see also links in references

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