

# factsandstats

## *Benefits of Physical Activity*

**B**eing physically active is important for the health and wellbeing of Australians. In fact it is of clear benefit in five of the six current Australian national health priorities including cardiovascular disease prevention; diabetes prevention and control; the primary prevention of some cancers; injury prevention and control; and the promotion of mental health.<sup>1</sup>

Just as importantly, physical activity provides a range of social, environmental and economic benefits and therefore has an important role in the wellbeing of individuals and communities.

### **Participation in physical activity**

Nearly half of Australians does not meet the recommended level of at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most days of the week.<sup>2</sup> Note that the recommended level of physical activity is frequently interpreted as 150 minutes of moderate activity over at least five sessions.<sup>3</sup>

Just under half of Western Australian adults (54.6 per cent) reported participating in levels of physical activity sufficient for health benefits.<sup>4</sup> The data was from the Western Australian Adult Survey 2002, which defined sufficient levels of activity as 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity over five or more sessions or 60 minutes of vigorous intensity activity in the previous week.<sup>5</sup>

Almost 30 per cent of Western Australian primary school students and 50 per cent of secondary school students reported no active play, while more than 90 per cent of all students reported doing some physical education and/or sport at school.<sup>6</sup> Most students were very active 'quite often' or 'always' during physical education or sport.<sup>7</sup>

### **Health benefits**

Participation in regular physical activity provides a large range of health benefits (physical and mental). Physical inactivity is the second most important risk factor after tobacco use that contributes to the burden of disease, morbidity and mortality in Australia.<sup>8</sup>



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## **Physical health benefits**<sup>9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17</sup>

Physical health benefits of participation in physical activity include:

- Reduction in risk of heart disease by as much as half;
- Better recovery from a heart attack and reduced risk of having a second heart attack;
- Reduced risk of stroke;
- Reduced risk of having high blood pressure and high cholesterol;
- Prevention and treatment of non-insulin dependent diabetes;
- Reduced risk of developing and dying from some cancers, such as colon and breast cancers; and assistance with coping, rehabilitation and survival from cancer;
- Prevention of obesity and weight management;
- Decreased body fat;
- Increased lean muscle, muscle strength and bone density;
- Reduced risk of chronic disease and death;
- Improved quality of life and long term health;
- Improved fitness and stamina;
- Stronger immune system;
- Increased energy; and
- Improvement in sleep.

In addition to the above, participation in sport and physical activity provides physical health benefits specific to children and older adults.

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## **Physical health benefits for children**

- Improved fitness, strength, flexibility and coordination;<sup>18</sup>
- Improved general health and assistance in weight management;<sup>19</sup>
- Development of a wide range of motor skills;<sup>20</sup>
- Healthy growth and development of the cardiorespiratory system as well as the bones and muscles of children;<sup>21</sup> and
- Establishment of healthy behaviours that young people will carry throughout their lives, such as better eating habits and decreased likelihood of smoking.<sup>22</sup>

## **Physical health benefits for seniors**<sup>23,24,25</sup>

- Improved physical health and longer life;
- Improved mobility, flexibility and functional ability;
- Reduced risk of disease;
- Reduction in effects of ageing, such as fewer years of disability;
- Stronger bones, reduced risk of osteoporosis and symptoms of osteoarthritis/rheumatoid arthritis;
- Reduced risk of falling and fracturing bones;
- Reduction in severity of falls; and
- Independence.

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## **Mental health benefits**<sup>26,27,28,29</sup>

Mental health benefits of participation in physical activity include:

- Improved self esteem and confidence;
- Reduction in stress, anxiety and depression;
- Improved mood and sense of wellbeing;
- Improved concentration, enhanced memory and learning, and better performance at school;
- Reduced feelings of fatigue and depression; and
- Improved psychological wellbeing and mental awareness.

## **Social benefits**<sup>30,31,32</sup>

Social benefits of participation in physical activity include:

- Increased community cohesion;
- Improved social/community networks and social capital;
- Improved family and community connectedness;
- Safer communities; and
- Reduction in sense of isolation and loneliness.

Participation in sport and physical activity also provides social benefits specific to children and older adults.

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## **Social benefits for children**

- Development of communication, interpersonal, leadership and co-operation skills;<sup>33</sup>
- Creation of lasting friendships;<sup>34</sup>
- Increased interest in accepting responsibility;<sup>35</sup>
- Teaches them how to deal with winning and losing;<sup>36</sup>
- Provides a vehicle for responsible risk taking;<sup>37</sup>
- Helps build social skills among children and may deter anti social behaviour;<sup>38</sup> and
- Helps young people develop self-discipline and leadership.<sup>39</sup>

## **Social benefits for seniors**<sup>40,41</sup>

- Increased social contact; and
- Prolonged, independent living.

## **Environmental benefits**<sup>42,43,44</sup>

Participation in physical activity leads to a range of environmental benefits, particularly where walking or cycling replaces car trips. Benefits include:

- Reduced traffic congestion;
- Reduced air pollution;
- Reduced greenhouse emissions;
- Reduced noise pollution;
- Safer places with people out and about; and
- Reduced need for the enormous amount of space required to store, drive and park motor vehicles.

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## **Economic benefits**

Economic benefits of participation in physical activity include:

- Health savings from reduced prevalence of chronic disease. An estimate based on national figures demonstrates that potential savings of 44 million dollars per year would be achieved by a five per cent increase in physical activity levels in Western Australia.<sup>45</sup> In addition, studies have shown that for every one per cent increase in the proportion of Australians who are sufficiently active, the national cost of three diseases – heart disease, diabetes and colon cancer – could be reduced by about \$3.6 million per year.<sup>46</sup>
- Productivity gains of \$60 million have been estimated if an extra ten per cent of the Western Australian population became active;<sup>47</sup>
- Creation of employment;<sup>48</sup>
- Attraction of tourism;<sup>49</sup>
- Low cost means of transport;<sup>50</sup>
- Support for local business;<sup>51</sup>
- Reduction in absenteeism;<sup>52</sup> and
- Reduction in crime.<sup>53</sup>

## **Other benefits of participation in sport and physical activity**

### **Personal benefits for children<sup>54</sup>**

- Teaches them self discipline, commitment and responsibility;
- Teaches them organisational skills and how to share; and
- Teaches them to deal with pressures and stress;

### **Benefits to parents<sup>55</sup>**

- Knowing where their children are, that they are being supervised and having fun;
- Appreciation that their children are being active and healthy;
- Better performance of their children in school. Research has shown that children who are involved in sport tend to stay in school longer and get better grades; and
- Assistance in behaviours that will encourage lifelong health and wellbeing.

# Benefits of Physical Activity

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Bauman, A., Bellew, B., Vita, P., Brown, W., Owen, N. (2002). (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Getting Australia active: towards better practice for the promotion of physical activity. Melbourne, Australia: National Public Health Partnership. p3. <http://www.nphp.gov.au/publications/sigpah/gaa.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> Bauman, A., Bellew, B., Vita, P., Brown, W., Owen, N. (2002). (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Getting Australia active: towards better practice for the promotion of physical activity (summary). Melbourne, Australia: National Public Health Partnership. p5. [http://www.nphp.gov.au/publications/sigpah/gaa\\_summary.pdf](http://www.nphp.gov.au/publications/sigpah/gaa_summary.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> McCormack, G., Milligan, R., Giles-Corti, B. and Clarkson, J.P. (2003). Physical activity levels of Western Australians 2002: results from the adult physical activity survey and pedometer study. Perth, Western Australia: Western Australian Government. p17.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid. p25.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid. p17.
- <sup>6</sup> Hands, B., Parker, H., Glasson, C., Brinkman, S. & Read, H. (2004). Physical activity and nutrition levels in Western Australian children and adolescents: report. Perth, Western Australia: Western Australian Government. p34.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid. p34.
- <sup>8</sup> Bauman, A., Bellew, B., Vita, P., Brown, W., Owen, N. (2002). (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Getting Australia Active: towards better practice for the promotion of physical activity (summary). op. cit. p5.
- <sup>9</sup> Government of Western Australia. (2002). (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Facts about physical activity, October 2002. Perth, Western Australia: Premier's Physical Activity Taskforce. [http://www.patf.dpc.wa.gov.au/documents/Fact\\_Sheet\\_1.pdf](http://www.patf.dpc.wa.gov.au/documents/Fact_Sheet_1.pdf)
- <sup>10</sup> Queensland Government. (2003). (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Evidence of health benefits of physical activity. Queensland: The State Government of Queensland (Queensland Health). <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/npag/evidence.asp>
- <sup>11</sup> Government of Western Australia. (2003). (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Facts about physical activity, March 2003. Perth, Western Australia: Premier's Physical Activity Task Force. [http://www.patf.dpc.wa.gov.au/documents/Fact\\_Sheet\\_2.pdf](http://www.patf.dpc.wa.gov.au/documents/Fact_Sheet_2.pdf)
- <sup>12</sup> Northern Territory Government, Department of Health and Community Services. (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Health benefits of physical activity. [http://www.nt.gov.au/health/comm\\_health/food\\_nutrition/physical\\_activity/benefits.shtml](http://www.nt.gov.au/health/comm_health/food_nutrition/physical_activity/benefits.shtml)
- <sup>13</sup> New South Wales Health. (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Benefits of physical activity. <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/public-health/health-promotion/activity/benefits/>
- <sup>14</sup> Bauman, A., Bellew, B., Vita, P., Brown, W., Owen, N. (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Getting Australia Active: towards better practice for the promotion of physical activity. op. cit.
- <sup>15</sup> Queensland Government. (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Benefits of physical activity. <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/npag/evidence.asp>
- <sup>16</sup> Bauman, A., Bellew, B., Vita, P., Brown, W., Owen, N. (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Getting Australia Active: towards better practice for the promotion of physical activity. op. cit.
- <sup>17</sup> State Government of Victoria. (26/07/2005: date of retrieval). Better Health Channel. Physical activity keeps you healthy. [http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Physical\\_activity\\_keeps\\_you\\_healthy?OpenDocument](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Physical_activity_keeps_you_healthy?OpenDocument)
- <sup>18</sup> Government of Western Australia. (22/08/2005: date of retrieval). Keep it fun: supporting youth sport. Clubs guide to encouraging positive parent behaviour. Perth, Western Australia: Department of Sport and Recreation. <http://www.dsr.wa.gov.au>
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>21</sup> Shilton, T. and Naughton, G. (2001). (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Physical activity and children: a statement of importance and call to action from the Heart Foundation. National Heart Foundation of Australia. <http://www.heartfoundation.com.au/downloads/physical%20activity%20and%20%20children.htm>
- <sup>22</sup> Government of Western Australia. (22/08/2005: date of retrieval). Keep it fun: supporting youth sport. Clubs guide to encouraging positive parent behaviour. op. cit.
- <sup>23</sup> Government of South Australia. (22/08/2005: date of retrieval). Seniors Information Service. Health and well being: physical activity. <http://www.seniors.asn.au>
- <sup>24</sup> Australian Sports Commission and Department of Veterans' Affairs. (2001). Older, smarter, fitter: a guide for providers of sport and physical activity programs for older Australians. Canberra, Australian Capital Territory: Australian Sports Commission and Department of Veterans' Affairs. p14.
- <sup>25</sup> Government of Western Australia. (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Facts about physical activity, October 2002. op. cit.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Queensland Government. (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Benefits of physical activity. op. cit.
- <sup>28</sup> Government of Western Australia. (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Facts about physical activity, March 2003. op. cit.
- <sup>29</sup> Government of Western Australia. (22/08/2005: date of retrieval). Keep it fun: supporting youth sport. Clubs guide to encouraging positive parent behaviour. op. cit.
- <sup>30</sup> Government of Western Australia. (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Facts about physical activity, March 2003. op. cit.
- <sup>31</sup> Government of Western Australia. (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Facts about physical activity, October 2002. op. cit.
- <sup>32</sup> Queensland Government. (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Benefits of physical activity. op. cit.
- <sup>33</sup> Government of Western Australia. (22/08/2005: date of retrieval). Keep it fun: supporting youth sport. Clubs guide to encouraging positive parent behaviour. <http://www.dsr.wa.gov.au>
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Government of Western Australia. (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Facts about physical activity, October 2002. op. cit.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup> Australian Sports Commission and Department of Veterans' Affairs. op. cit. p14.
- <sup>41</sup> Government of Western Australia. (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Facts about physical activity, October 2002. op. cit.
- <sup>42</sup> Queensland Government. (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Benefits of physical activity. op. cit.
- <sup>43</sup> Government of Western Australia. (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Facts about physical activity, March 2003. op. cit.
- <sup>44</sup> Government of Western Australia. (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Facts about physical activity, October 2002. op. cit.
- <sup>45</sup> Premier's Physical Activity Taskforce. (2001). Getting Western Australians more active: a strategic direction report from the Premier's physical activity taskforce. Perth, Western Australia: Premier's physical activity taskforce. p11.
- <sup>46</sup> McCormack, G., Milligan, R., Giles-Corti, B. and Clarkson, J.P. (2003). op. cit. p8.
- <sup>47</sup> Premier's Physical Activity Taskforce. (2001). Getting Western Australians more active: a strategic direction report from the Premier's physical activity taskforce. op. cit. p13.
- <sup>48</sup> Queensland Government. (15/09/2005: date of retrieval). Benefits of physical activity. op. cit.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>54</sup> Government of Western Australia. (22/08/2005: date of retrieval). Keep it fun: supporting youth sport. Clubs guide to encouraging positive parent behaviour. op. cit.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid.