

Study: When it comes to physical activity, one size does not fit all

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A landmark University of Alberta study, analyzing a sample of over 275,000 individuals, has found that when it comes to participation in physical activity, one size does not fit all.

“Our study uncovered some definite trends and preferences when deciding how and if a person wants to be physically active,” says Brad Humphreys, an economics professor at the University of Alberta. “It is clear that different genders, ethnicities and income levels have very diverse influences and choices when it comes to being physically active.”

The study, co-authored with U of A professor Jane Ruseski, looked at a wide range of factors, including income, education and ethnicity, that influence whether a person decides to be physically active, as well as their time spent being active. It also examined the impact of government spending on parks and recreation on an individual’s decision to participate in physical activity and sports.

At a 57 per cent participation rate, walking was found to be the most common form of physical activity undertaken for exercise. Results suggest that participation in walking increases with age, indicating that programs aimed at promoting walking for exercise could appeal to older populations, says Humphreys.

“Choosing walking as the main form of physical activity may reflect the relatively low cost of this activity,” says Humphreys. “Walking can be done in almost any setting under almost any condition without needing

specialized equipment or facilities.”

It was found that participation in all types of physical activities increased when a person had a higher level of income and that people with a post-secondary education participated in outdoor recreation activities more than high school graduates. As well, females were less likely to participate in outdoor recreation activities, group sports and individual sports than males.

“Compared to men, we found that females spent an average of 444 minutes fewer per week doing outdoor recreation, 108 minutes fewer spent on group sports and 74 minutes fewer on individual sports,” says Humphreys. “This can be explained by child-care responsibilities and the fact that women spend almost an hour more on household activities compared to men per week.”

“Our results have important implications for the design of government interventions aimed at increasing physical activity,” says Humphreys. “When developing these programs, we must take into account North America’s diverse population. A program that increases participation in one population, say older adults and retirees, in a particular state, may not have the same effect on young married minority couples in another state.”

Source: University of Alberta

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