

Study: Only a Third of Americans Aware of Exercise Recommendations (w/ Video)

September 24 2009

(PhysOrg.com) -- Only a third of Americans could identify national recommendations for minimum daily physical activity of 30 minutes, despite more than a decade of publicity campaigns, according to research led by a Duke University professor.

Consistent with other studies, researchers also found that fewer than half of all Americans meet the 1995 recommendations issued by the Centers for Disease Control and American College of Sports Medicine.

Increasing the number of Americans who follow the recommendations could help reduce chronic health problems, said Gary Bennett, an associate professor of psychology and neuroscience at Duke and lead author of the study.

“Physical activity is important for protecting against a large number of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, some cancers, diabetes, even some cognitive disorders,” Bennett said. “So the physical activity recommendations are extremely important to help increase awareness among the American population about the amount of physical activity that is necessary to reduce the risk of developing these diseases.”

Increasing the number of Americans who get at least 30 minutes of daily exercise also could reduce overall health care costs, said Bennett, who conducted the research while a faculty member at Harvard University’s School of Public Health and at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in

Boston.

“We’ve seen a lot discussion about prevention in [health care reform](#) debates over the last few months and it’s becoming clear that increasing physical activity among Americans may, in the long run, reduce some of the major costs that burden our [health care](#) system,” Bennett said.

Since 1995, national organizations and the federal government have used media such as TV, radio, Internet and print to inform Americans they should be doing at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity daily. The study, which appears in the October issue of “Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise” ([journals.lww.com/acsm-msse/Ful... ical_Activity.3.aspx](#)), focused on segments of the American public most likely exposed to these mediums.

The results were taken from cross-sectional analyses of 2,381 participants in the “2005 Health Information National Trends Survey,” a national probability sample of the U.S. population contacted via random-digit dial.

The report said one reason for the limited success is the “highly generalized, saturating effect of media in the current environment. Through varied sources, many are bombarded with multiple physical activity and general health promotion ‘recommendations’ that may be challenging to differentiate.”

The study found this lack of knowledge to be more pronounced among men, the unemployed, U.S.-born individuals, and those who were not meeting the physical activity recommendations.

Bennett sees cause for hope, however.

Last year the federal government issued more definitive “guidelines,”

with specific activity targets for different segments of the population: adults, children, elderly, disabled, and pregnant (view them at www.health.gov/paguidelines/pdf/fs_prof.pdf).

“Now that we have one coordinated set of guidelines, we think we may have a better chance of decreasing some of the confusion in the American public about what the guidelines really are,” Bennett said, adding that he’d like to see more spending on public information campaigns about the new guidelines.

Bennett also noted that the guidelines should drive public policy, especially in schools, which have seen major cuts in [physical activity](#) programs.

Provided by Duke University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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