

Lack of exercise adds to women's healthcare costs

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Active women cost health system less.

(Medical Xpress)—A lack of exercise is costing the Australian healthcare system \$40 million a year for women alone, according to new research from The University of Queensland (UQ).

Researchers from the Centre for Research Excellence in Women's Health in the 21st Century (CREWH21) at UQ's School of Population Health found that even a moderate increase in physical activity could reverse the costs.

Dr Geeske Peeters and colleagues used data from more than 6000 middle-aged Australian [women](#) to investigate how long periods of sitting and too little activity were impacting on direct [health care costs](#).

"We know that physical inactivity is associated with numerous physical and [mental health conditions](#) and accounts for up to three per cent of total direct health care costs," Dr Peeters said.

Data from 2010 showed the median annual health care cost for inactive participants was \$741 per year, versus just \$689 per year for active participants.

Comparisons of participant data between 2001 and 2010 also showed the median cost of health care for inactive participants was \$94 higher than that of highly active participants.

Dr Peeters said that while up to 15 per cent of Australian women aged between 45 and 65 were inactive, the data showed that their direct health costs could be reduced by increasing physical activity.

"If these women increased their activity levels, their reduced direct health care costs would translate to a saving of nearly \$40 million a year in the country's health care costs," she said.

"The cost savings could be even higher if women with the highest health care costs could improve their activity levels."

She said findings were consistent among women of normal weight and

those that were overweight or obese.

"We found that [physical inactivity](#), rather than prolonged sitting or body weight, was the most important predictor of high [health care](#) costs for middle-aged women," Dr Peeters said.

The study collected data from participants in the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health and linked it with data from Medicare.

Participating women answered questions about time spent sitting, walking, and in moderate and vigorous leisure activities in surveys completed at three-yearly intervals from 2001 to 2010.

Health-related costs averaged over the survey year were used to calculate annual costs.

The study was published in the March 2014 edition of the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

Provided by University of Queensland

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