

Inactivity 'biggest factor' in women's heart risk

May 28 2014, by Caroline Day



Recommended guidelines say women over 30 should be doing 150 minutes of moderately intense physical exercise per week

(Medical Xpress)—Lack of exercise is a greater risk for heart disease in women over 30 than smoking, obesity and high blood pressure, University of Queensland researchers have found.

Women's risk factors for [heart disease](#) change across their lifespan, says Professor Wendy Brown, of the Centre for Research on Exercise, Physical Activity and Health at UQ's School of Human Movement Studies.

"Smoking has the greatest impact below the age of 30," said Professor Brown, who undertook the research with colleague Dr Toby Pavey. The *British Journal of Sports Medicine* published their results this week.

"As women get older and more give up smoking, physical inactivity became the dominant influence on heart problems across the study population," Professor Brown said.

Heart disease remains the leading cause of death in high-income countries, and smoking, obesity, [high blood pressure](#) and physical inactivity together account for more than half the global prevalence.

Professor Brown said the study findings suggested that more needed to be done to promote regular exercise in women and to keep women active, "now and into the future".

"Continuing efforts to encourage people to stop smoking are warranted, but much more emphasis should be placed on [physical inactivity](#)," she said.

The research was based on evidence gathered in the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health, which has been tracking the health of more than 32,000 women for 18 years.

Professor Brown said national programs for the promotion and maintenance of [physical activity](#) – across the adult lifespan, but especially in young adulthood – deserved a much higher public health priority for women than they have now.

"If all over-30s followed recommended exercise guidelines—150 minutes of moderately intense physical activity per week—the lives of more than 2600 middle-aged and older women could be saved each year in Australia alone," she said.

A statistical measure called Population Attributable Risk was used to calculate the proportion of heart disease risk attributed to each risk factor at different ages.

This study is among the first in populations of developed countries to look specifically at the impact of inactivity on adult women of all ages.

It was conducted by Professor Brown and Dr Pavey from The University of Queensland, and Professor Adrian Bauman from The University of Sydney.

Professor Brown is the lead author of the evidence review for the new Australian physical activity guidelines released in February. The guidelines recommend adults should accumulate between 150 and 300 minutes per week of at least moderate intensity physical activity.

She said her latest research findings reinforced the importance of more investment in helping [women](#) to achieve this recommendation.

The full study findings are published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*.

Provided by University of Queensland

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