

Majority of people with severe mental ill health would like to be more physically active, new research suggests

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Taking part in regular physical activity is linked to a more positive outlook on general health in people with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, according to a new report.

People with a serious mental illness have some of the worst physical health of any section of the population and strategies to help reduce inequalities and improve their health are urgently needed.

Health gap

Researchers, led by academics at the University of York, analysed data collected on over 3000 people with severe mental ill health, making this one of the largest studies of health and [lifestyle](#) for this population ever undertaken.

The majority of participants in the study (61 percent) reported wanting to become more physically active or wanting to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

However, other key findings from the study point to lifestyle factors which contribute to a "[health gap](#)":

- 54 percent reported eating two or fewer portions of fruit and vegetables per day

- 53 percent reported drinking alcohol, and 45 percent were current smokers
- Only 38 percent of respondents reported undertaking [physical activity](#) every day or every other day

Lifestyle changes

The study is the first to emerge from the UK "Closing the Gap" programme of research led by the University of York.

Over the next four years, the research network will work with the same participants to further understand the causes of health inequality and to design interventions that can be used to increase activity and make lifestyle changes to improve physical health.

Lead author of the study, Dr. Masuma Mishu from the Department of Health Sciences at the University of York, said: "these important findings are based on a detailed analysis of large sample of people with the most severe forms of mental illness in the NHS. Our study provides vital insights into diet, smoking and exercise for this group and highlights some of the factors those are associated with undertaking [regular physical activity](#)."

Professor Simon Gilbody, co-author of the paper from the Department Of Health Sciences and Hull York Medical School and Director of "Closing the Gap", added: "this is the first analysis to emerge from this important UK study. In time we need to ensure the NHS can help to tackle the causes of poor physical health for people who use mental [health](#) services. The study helps us to think about how we can encourage physical activity, improve diet and encourage people with severe mental illness to quit smoking; these are the areas where NHS could improve further."

More information: Masuma Pervin Mishu et al. Factors associated with regular physical activity participation among people with severe mental ill health, *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* (2018). DOI: [10.1007/s00127-018-1639-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-018-1639-2)

Provided by University of York

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