

Variety is key for the fittest Americans

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(HealthDay)—Very fit American adults enjoy a wider range of physical activities than those who are less active, a new study finds.

The findings could help point to ways to boost [physical activity](#) in adults, according to the researchers.

Data gathered from more than 9,800 adults nationwide between 2003 and 2006 showed that those who were active had done at least two different activities in the past month, but the most active did five.

"Since a greater variety of activities was associated with meeting [exercise](#) guidelines, mixing up your workouts to vary the type of exercise could be beneficial," said study lead author Susan Malone, an assistant professor of nursing at New York University, in New York City.

Walking was the most common activity, with more than 30% of adults averaging four 40-minute walks a week. Cycling and dancing were the next most common activities, the study found.

Forty-four percent of adults reported no physical activity. Those with chronic health problems and unhealthy lifestyle habits like smoking were more likely to be inactive, according to the study published recently in the journal *Translational Behavioral Medicine*.

But the researchers noted that some adults with [chronic health problems](#) do exercise regularly, suggesting that these patients can work physical activity into their lives.

"When encouraging their patients to exercise, clinicians should not just ask about frequency, but also what types of physical activities their patients do. They may even suggest engaging in a variety of activities," Malone said in a news release.

"The ultimate goal is to develop targeted interventions to help people stick to their exercise plans and lower their disease risk," she added.

National guidelines recommend adults get 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity exercise, 75 minutes of vigorous exercise, or a combination of the two. But more than half of U.S. adults don't achieve that.

The guidelines don't account for the type or variety of activities.

"Developing a better understanding of patterns of physical activity, and the individual factors related to these patterns, could inform targeted interventions to increase physical activity," Malone said.

More information: The U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute offers a [guide to physical activity](#).

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