

# Few overweight people with diabetes getting recommended physical activity

10 September 2014, by Sharyn Alden



A study of exercise habits in people with diabetes finds that women with diabetes who are trying to lose weight are far more physically active than women with diabetes who are not trying to control their weight. Furthermore, men with diabetes were more physically active than women with diabetes, but no one was exercising the recommended amount for weight loss, according to the study reported in *American Journal of Health Promotion*.

Adults who are overweight or obese are at an increased risk for developing [diabetes](#). Regular participation in [physical activity](#) may not only help reduce [weight](#), but also help treat diabetes, and may prevent consequences associated with physical inactivity. Increasing physical activity levels among adults with diabetes is a public health priority. This study sought to assess the association between physical activity and weight control in U.S. adults with diabetes.

"We were not surprised that, overall, people with diabetes trying to [lose weight](#) were not engaging in enough physical activity," said co-author Gina Pariser, PT, Ph.D., associate professor at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky.

"People with diabetes who had health comorbidities, such as arthritis and peripheral neuropathy, engaged in even less activity than those without comorbidities. This finding emphasizes the need for [health care professionals](#) to provide more detailed and individualized education on exercise," Pariser said.

Pariser and her colleague Paul D. Loprinzi, Ph.D., used the 2003-2006 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey to analyze the [physical activity levels](#) of 733 adults (396 men and 337 women) with diabetes and 4572 people without diabetes. Participants wore an accelerometer to assess their physical activity and were asked about whether they were trying to lose weight, trying to maintain their weight or neither trying to lose nor maintain weight.

Researchers found that women with diabetes working on losing weight were more likely to engage in moderate to vigorous physical activity than their counterparts who weren't trying to lose or maintain weight. Results were similar for women without diabetes. Men, with and without diabetes, appeared not to differ in activity level regardless of weight control status and engaged in more physical activity than women. Regardless of gender, few people with diabetes who were trying to lose weight engaged in sufficient physical activity.

While encouraging patients to increase their physical activity is important, the researchers say, encouragement is not enough. Pariser notes, "Education about specific amounts of physical activity is needed to achieve goals such as [weight loss](#) and blood sugar control. Plus, instruction in the use of tools to objectively measure the amount of physical activity, like pedometers, should be provided."

Karen Kemmis, PT, DPT, certified diabetes educator and adjunct professor with SUNY Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, New York,

commented that the findings of the study were not surprising, but it was good to see that diabetic [women](#) increased their physical activity when trying to lose weight.

But the problem is people just don't hear—because they may not be listening or disregard what they hear—the recommended exercise levels, she said. "The suggested levels of exercise were not just pulled out of a hat. They are specific and important because they benefit people with diabetes."

Kemmis further noted, "In my experience, what's really important in getting people to add more physical activity into their life is to individualize strategies that work with their lifestyle. This is huge. When I ask an individual if they can do a recommended 30 minutes of exercise a day, it can sound overwhelming, but they may not realize they can also exercise for 10 minutes 3 times a day and still reap the benefits. It all adds up. The key, from a diabetic educator's perspective, is to be very specific, and also reasonable."

Provided by Health Behavior News Service

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