

# Adult Physical Activity

## Key points

- According to the Health Survey for England (self-reported data), 39% of men and 29% of women met the government's physical activity recommendations (30 minutes moderate physical activity, 5 times a week) in 2008 ([Figure 1](#)).
- The Active People Survey 3 (self-reported data) showed that 25% of men and 19% of women participated in at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity sport or active recreational activities on at least 3 days per week ([Figure 2](#)).
- Objective accelerometer data, collected for the first time in 2008, showed that only 6% of men and 4% of women met the government's physical activity recommendations ([Figure 3](#)).
- Self-reported data are influenced by the respondent's ability to accurately recall and assess their physical activity. Accelerometer data are objective and provide standardised measures of physical activity. Although accelerometer data have advantages over self-reported data, they do have limitations for example accelerometers are less good at recording activities such as cycling and rowing.
- The percentage of adults meeting the physical activity recommendations declines with age, for both self-report and accelerometer data ([Figures 1 and 3](#)).
- Overall, the percentage of adults achieving recommended levels of physical activity increased steadily between 1997 and 2008, from 26% to 36% for all adults ([Figure 4](#)).
- Physical activity levels are related to household income. Men and women from the lowest income group are least likely to meet the government's recommendations ([Figure 5](#)).
- People aged between 25 and 54 years are less likely than those under 25 or over 54 years to be sedentary for six hours or more, especially on weekdays. The pattern is similar for men and women during the week, but men of most ages are slightly more likely to be sedentary for six hours or more on weekend days ([Figure 6](#)).
- Men and women have similar attitudes to physical activity. 44% of men and 45% of women believe that they can get enough physical activity in their daily life 'without doing sport or exercise' such as jogging or going to the gym ([Figure 7](#)).

## Current figures

Figure 1 shows the proportion of adults meeting the government's current physical activity recommendations (30 minutes or more of at least moderate intensity physical activity on at least 5 occasions per week) in 2008, according to self-reported data collected by the Health Survey for England (HSE). Overall, 39% of men and 29% of women reported levels of activity that met the recommendations.

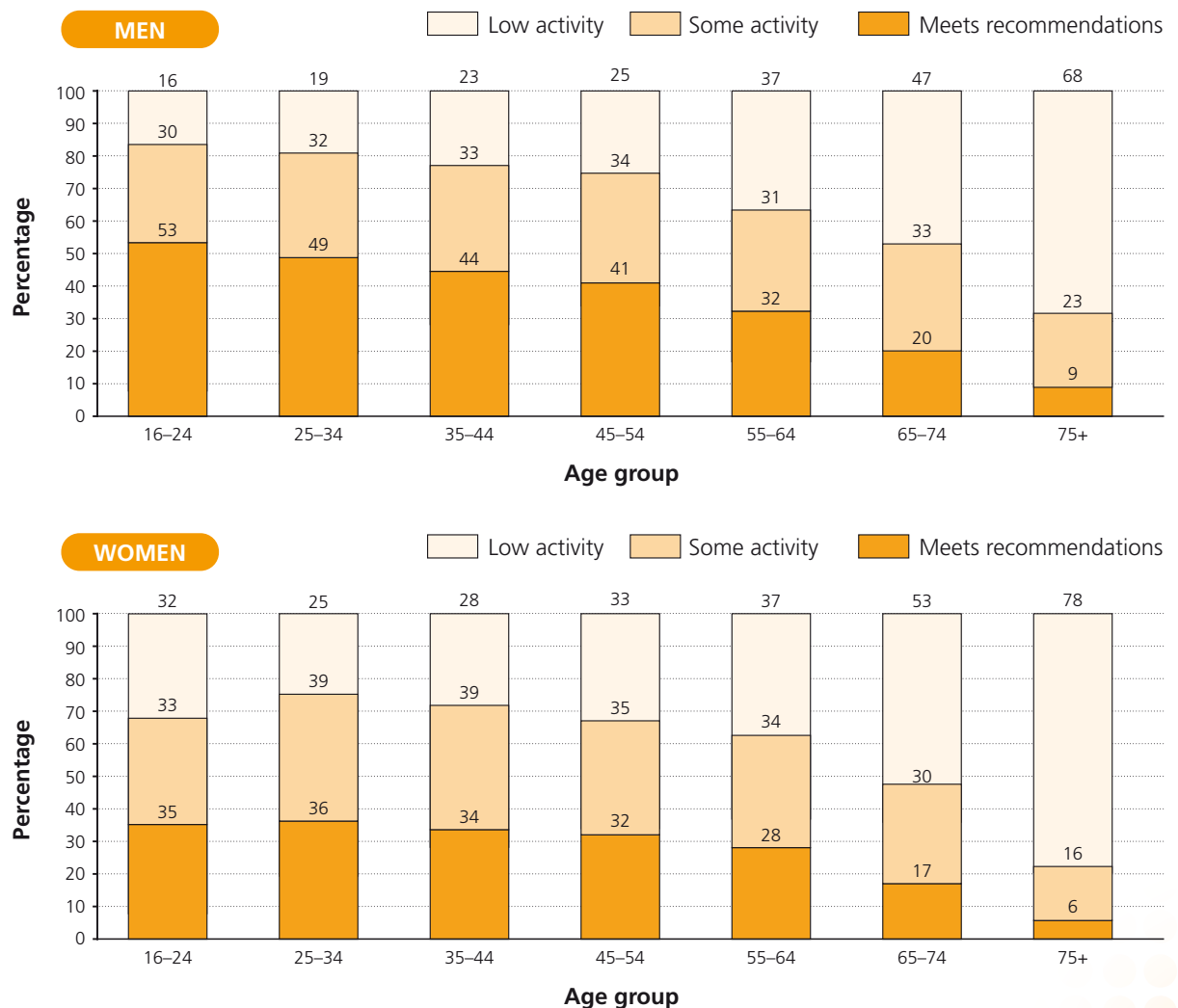
The 2008 questionnaire collected extra information on physical activity compared to previous years. People were classified into three groups as below.

Category	Definition
Meets recommendations	30 minutes or more of moderate activity on 20 or more occasions in the last 28 days
Some activity	30 minutes or more of moderate activity on four to 19 occasions in the last 28 days
Low activity	30 minutes or more of moderate activity on fewer than four occasions in the last 28 days

The proportion of men meeting the recommendations declines steeply with age from 16–24 through to 75 years and over, while the proportion in the 'some activity' group remains steady until 75 years and over. Among women, there is little decline in the proportion meeting recommendations until 55–64. The proportion of women in the 'some activity' group does not fall much until 75 years and over.

These are self-reported data and are influenced by the respondent's ability to accurately recall and assess their physical activity.

**FIGURE 1: Summary activity levels, by age and sex (base: aged 16 and over)**



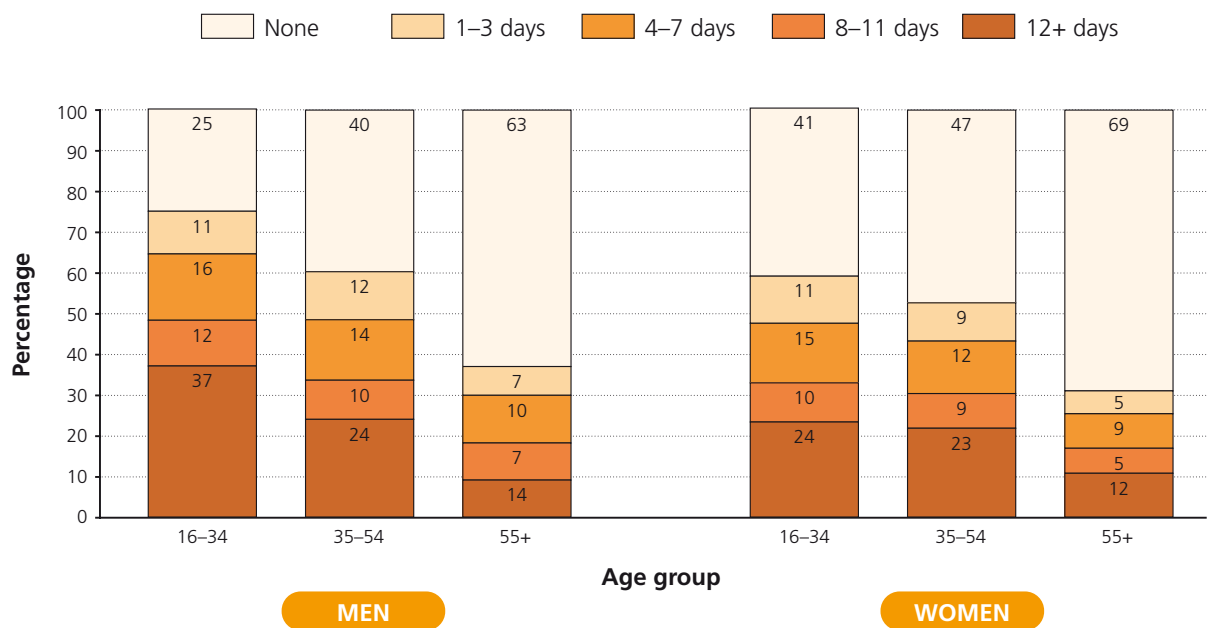
Source: Health Survey for England 2008 Report.

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The Active People Survey (APS), conducted on behalf of Sport England, provides information on adult participation in sports and active recreation, formerly National Indicator 8 (NI8). NI8 is defined as the percentage of adults, aged 16 years and over, who participated in moderate intensity sport and active recreation for at least 30 minutes on at least 12 days out of the previous 4 weeks (equivalent to 3 days per week). The difference between APS and HSE data is the definition used. HSE reports the number of occasions a person participates in physical activity for 30 minutes a day whereas the APS reports active recreation or sports for at least 30 minutes in a single session, excluding activity related to active transport such as riding/walking to work.

Figure 2 provides a summary of the results for the APS3 survey conducted during 2009. The percentage of men participating in at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on at least 3 days per week decreased from 37% in the younger age groups to 14% for those 55 and over. The results for women were 23% for those under 55, dropping to 12% in those over 55.

**FIGURE 2: Summary activity levels by age and sex, England, 2009**



Source: Sport England, Active People Survey, 2009.

## Objective measurement of physical activity: accelerometer data

The HSE included an objective measurement of physical activity for the first time in 2008. Accelerometer data are objective and provide standardised measures of physical activity. Although accelerometer data have advantages over self-reported data, they do have limitations; for example accelerometers are less good at recording activities such as cycling and rowing.

The summary activity level classification for accelerometer data, for participants with seven valid days of data, is as follows:

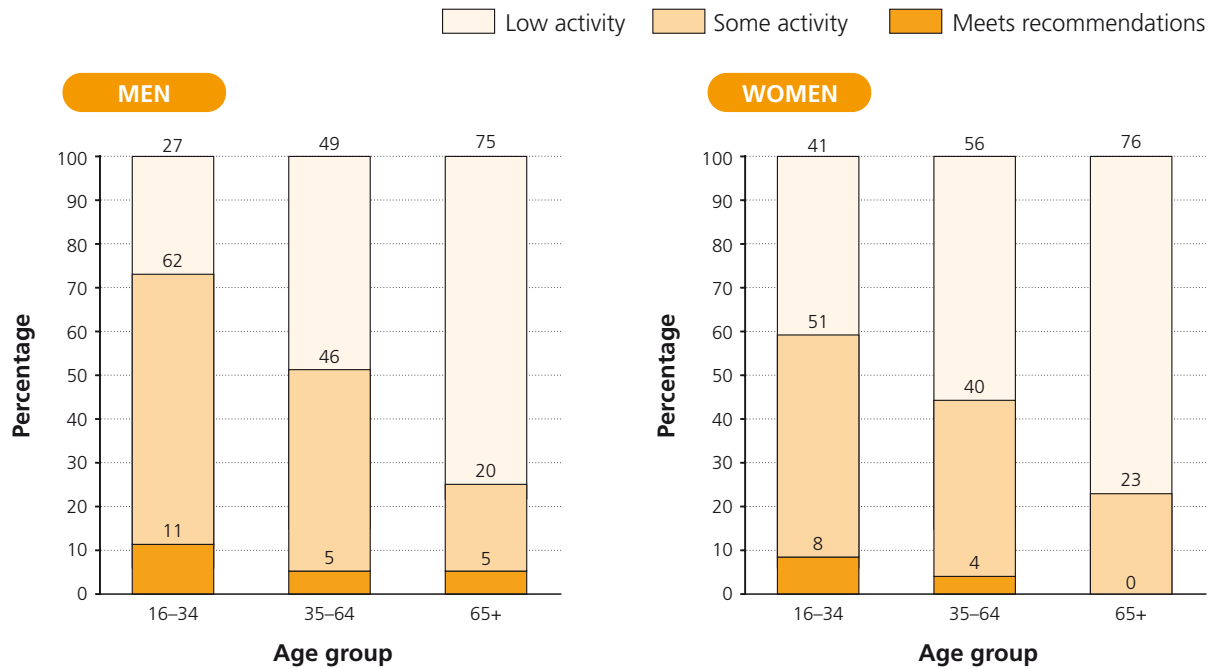
Category	Definition
Meets recommendations	30 minutes or more of moderate activity, accumulated in bouts of at least 10 minutes' duration, on at least five of the seven days
Some activity	30 minutes or more of moderate or vigorous activity on one to four days
Low activity	Lower levels of activity

When accelerometers were used to assess physical activity, only 6% of men and 4% of women met the government's recommendations, compared to 39% and 29% respectively from self-reported data.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of men and women of different ages in the 'some activity' and 'low activity' groups as well as the percentage achieving recommended levels. As before, physical activity decreases with age. While the majority of men and women aged 16-34 years are in the 'some activity' category, almost 50% of men aged 35-64 years, and 75% of men aged over 65 years, are in the low

activity group. For women, around 55% aged 35–64 years and 76% aged over 65 years are in the low activity group.

**FIGURE 3: Objective summary activity levels (base: aged 16 and over with 7 days' valid accelerometry)**



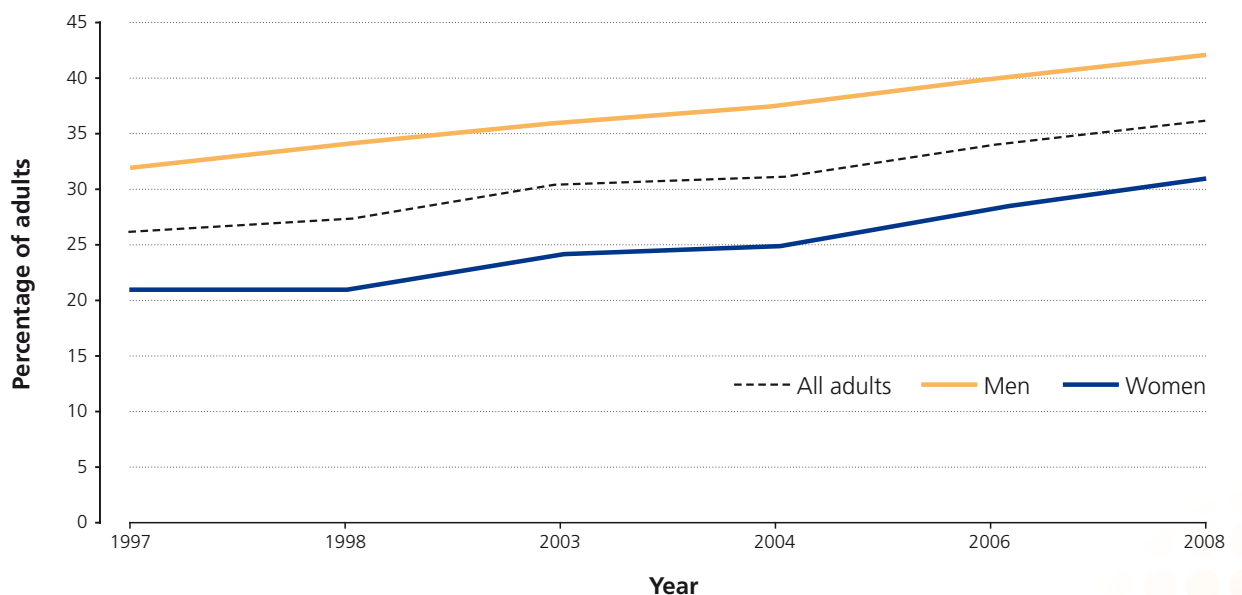
Source: Health Survey for England 2008 Report.  
 Figures remain the sole and exclusive property of The Health and Social Care Information Centre.

## Trends

The percentage of adults achieving recommended levels of physical activity increased steadily between 1997 and 2008, rising from 32% to 42% among men, and from 21% to 31% among women. Note that these figures are again based on self-reported data.

In order for the most recent data to be directly comparable with previous years, the 2008 data presented in this chart are based on a different method than the 2008 data presented in the 'Current figures' section.

**FIGURE 4: Percentage of adults (aged 16 and over) meeting physical activity recommendations**

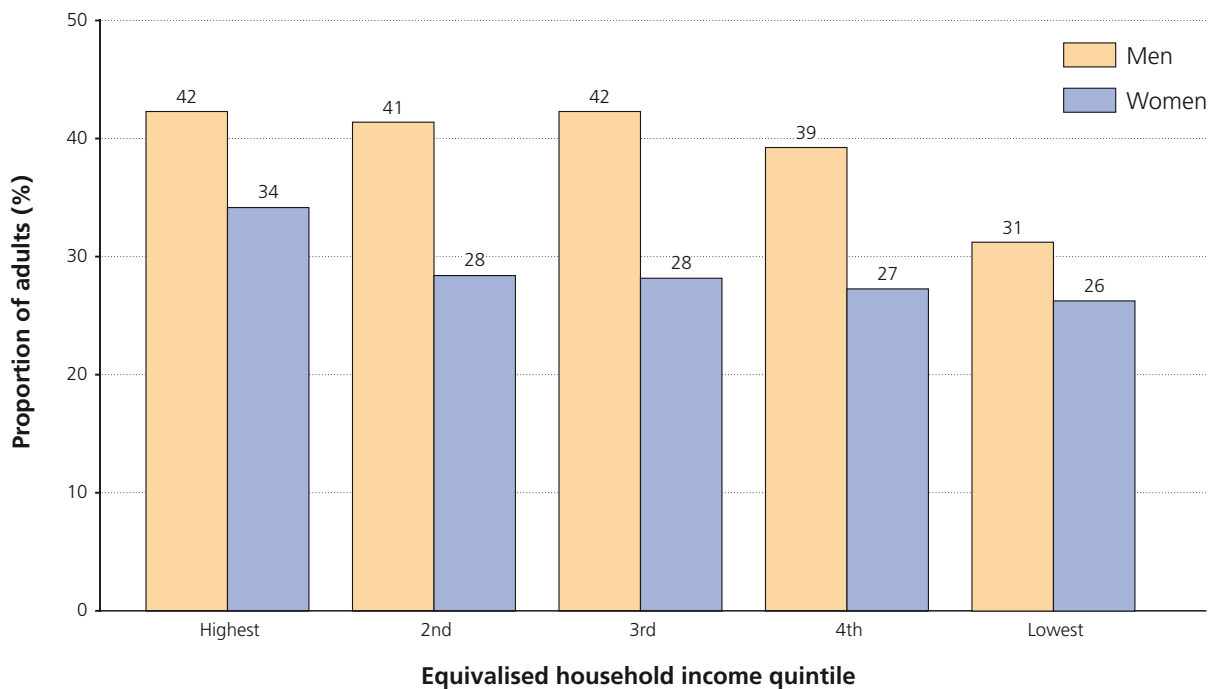


Source: Health Survey for England.  
 Data were collected only for the years presented above.

## Physical activity and income

Physical activity is related to household income. Figure 5 shows that those from the highest income households are more likely than those from the lowest income households to meet the government's recommendations. Both men and women in the lowest income quintile are least likely to meet the recommendations. For men there is little variation with income in the top four quintiles, while for women there is little variation in the lowest four.

**FIGURE 5: Proportion of adults (aged 16 and over) meeting physical activity recommendations, by equivalised\* household income and sex**



Source: Health Survey for England 2008 Report.

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\*Equivalised household income is a measure that takes account of the number of people in the household. For this analysis, households were split into five equal-sized groups banded by income level (income quintiles). Physical activity levels were compared between these groups.

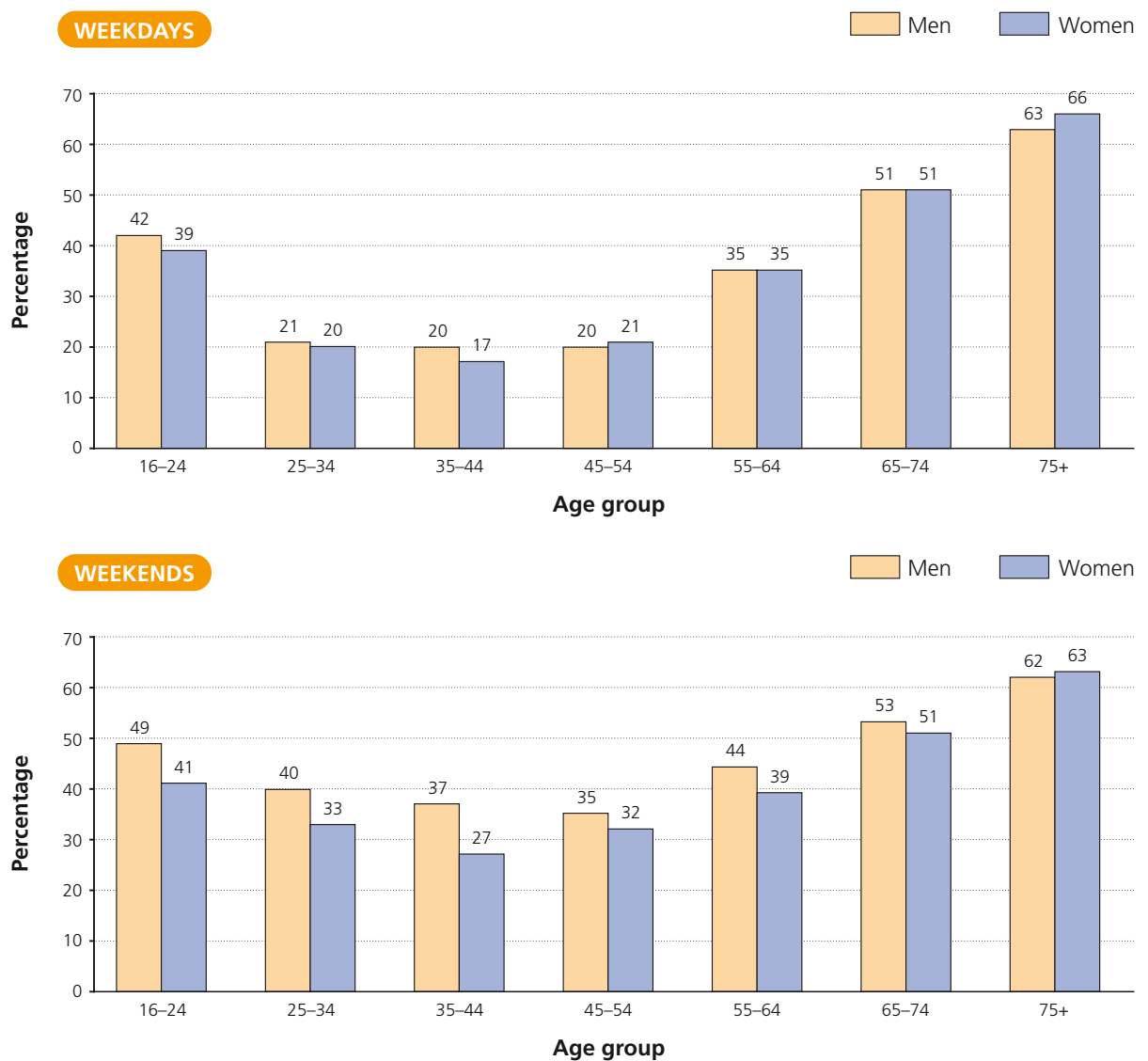
## Sedentary time

The enhanced HSE questionnaire in 2008 included questions on sedentary time, which aim to find out how much leisure time, on average, people spend watching television and on other sedentary activities such as reading, eating, studying, drawing, using a computer or playing video games.

Figure 6 shows the proportion of men and women of different ages spending six or more hours per day in sedentary activities. The pattern is very similar for men and women during the week, but men of most ages are slightly more likely to be sedentary at the weekend. Overall, 44% of men and 39% of women spend six hours or more in sedentary activities on weekend days. People aged between 25 and 54 years are less likely than those under 25 or over 54 years to be sedentary for six hours or more, especially on weekdays.

Note that these are again self-reported data, which are subjective and are influenced by the respondent's ability to accurately recall and assess their physical activity.

**FIGURE 6: Proportion spending 6 or more hours sedentary time per day (base: aged 16 and over)**



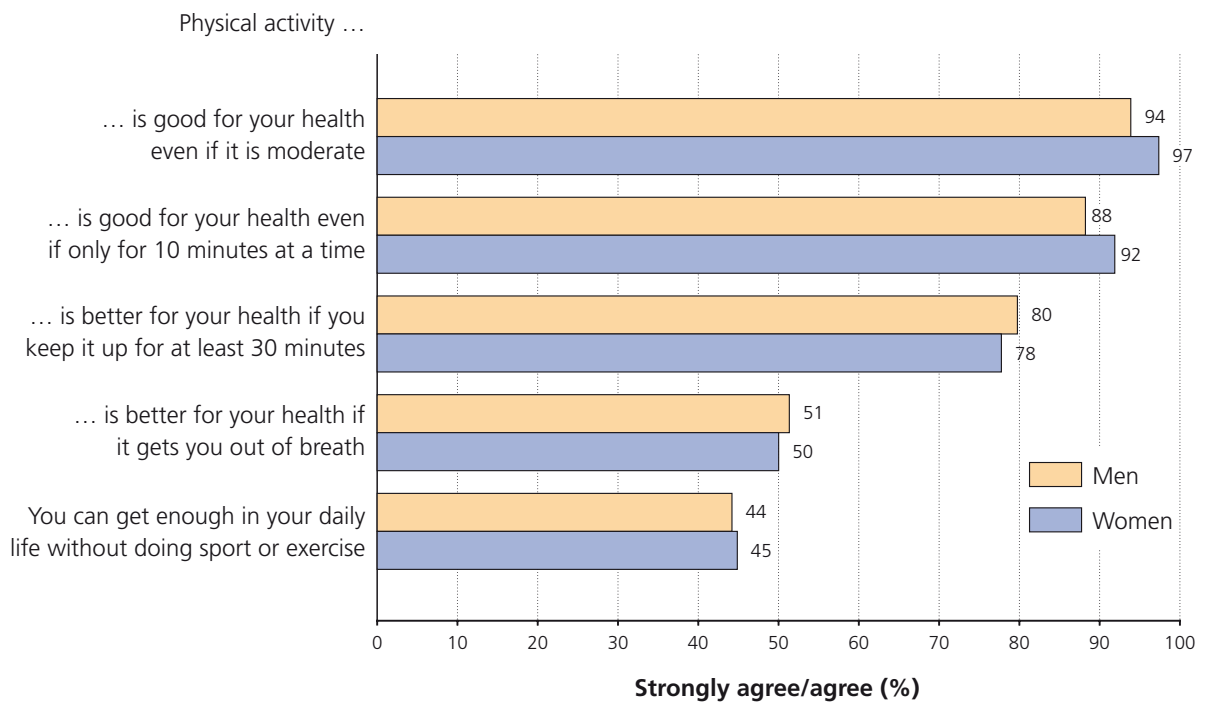
Source: Health Survey for England 2008 Report.

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## Attitudes to physical activity

Figure 7 contrasts attitudes to physical activity among men and women, as demonstrated by agreement with a range of statements in the 2007 HSE questionnaire. It shows that men and women have very similar attitudes, with the vast majority agreeing that physical activity is good for their health, but fewer seeing the desirability of more vigorous exercise. 44% of men and 45% of women believe that they can get enough physical activity in their daily life 'without doing sport or exercise' such as jogging or going to the gym. Around half agreed that physical activity is better 'if it gets you out of breath' (51% and 50% respectively).

**FIGURE 7: Proportion agreeing with attitudes to physical activity, by sex (base: aged 16–64)**



Source: Health Survey for England 2007 Report.

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## Data sources

### Health Survey for England

The HSE is a cross-sectional survey which samples a representative proportion of the population. The data presented here include HSE 2007 and HSE 2008 data. The primary focus of the HSE 2007 was knowledge and attitudes about key aspects of lifestyle data: smoking, drinking, eating and physical activity. The HSE 2008 focused on physical activity and fitness levels and included accelerometer data from a sample of approximately 3,600 adults together with a step test to measure cardiovascular fitness. These data provide objective measurements of physical activity and help with validating the survey questionnaire.

*Timing of data collection:* The survey is conducted annually. Data for some of the time series are available from 1993 onwards. Certain years include 'boost samples' which focus on specific population groups: e.g. 2004 included a boost of individuals from minority ethnic groups.

*Date of next release:* The 2009 report was published online in December 2010. The data will be available from the UK Data Archive two to three months after publication of the report. No physical activity data were collected in the HSE 2009.

## Active People Survey

The APS is a telephone survey conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Sport England. It measures the level of participation in physical activity by adults (defined as people aged 16 and over) living in England. The survey is conducted across every local authority in England and collects self-reported physical activity levels in the four weeks prior to interview. Random digit dialing generates a representative sample of telephone numbers and computer-assisted telephone interviewing is used. In the first Active People Survey ('APS1'), conducted between October 2005 and October 2006, 363,724 interviews were conducted with an average of 1,000 interviews per local authority. For the second and third Active People Surveys ('APS2' & 'APS3'), 191,325 and 193,947 interviews, respectively, were conducted with an average of 500 interviews per local authority.

*Timing of data collection:* The survey began in 2005/06 and is repeated annually.

*Date of next release:* The 2008/09 data is currently available on the Active People Diagnostic website. Collection of the 2009/10 data was completed in October 2010 and headline figures relating to sport were available in December 2010. 2009/10 data are expected to be available during spring 2011.

## Definitions

The recommended level of physical activity for adults is 30 minutes or more of at least moderate intensity physical activity on at least 5 occasions per week.

## Useful resources

### Health Survey for England

<http://www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/health-and-lifestyles-related-surveys/health-survey-for-england>

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/PublishedSurvey/HealthSurveyForEngland/Healthsurveyresults/index.htm>

### Active People Survey

[http://www.sportengland.org/research/active\\_people\\_survey.aspx](http://www.sportengland.org/research/active_people_survey.aspx)

## Changes summary

- **March 2010:** Original report
- **January 2011:** Updated to include 2009 Active People Survey