

STATISTICAL BRIEF #70

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Exercise in Adults, Age 18 and Older, in the United States, 2002: Estimates for the Noninstitutionalized Population

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Introduction

Regular physical activity that is performed on most days of the week has been demonstrated to reduce the risk of developing or dying from some of the leading causes of illness and death in the United States. A Surgeon General's report on exercise concluded that moderate exercise can reduce the risk for heart disease, diabetes, colon cancer, and hypertension (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

This Statistical Brief presents data from the Household Component of the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS-HC) concerning exercise among the adult, age 18 and older, noninstitutionalized (community) population. Estimates are for calendar year 2002. Emphasis is placed on the relationships between exercise and age, race/ethnicity, sex, income, education level, and health insurance status. Only differences that are statistically significant at the 0.05 level are discussed in the text.

Findings

Age

The age group 18 to 44 was the most likely to exercise. Of those individuals age 18 to 44, 59.7 percent reported exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more. This compares with 53.5 percent and 46.7 percent, respectively, for the age groups 45 to 64 and 65 and older (figure 1).

Race/ethnicity

White non-Hispanic or Latino, single race were the most likely to report exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more when compared with all other race/ethnic groups. Exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more was reported by 58.1 percent of white non-Hispanic or Latino, single race. For Hispanics or Latinos, black non-Hispanic or Latino, single race, and other races/multiple race, non-Hispanic or Latino the percentages reporting exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more were 48.8, 49.2, and 51.6, respectively (figure 2).

Highlights

- In 2002, 55.6 percent of adults 18 and older reported spending half an hour or more in moderate or vigorous physical activity at least three times a week.
- Among adults 18 and older in 2002, 59.7 percent of those age 18 to 44 were the most likely to exercise at least three times per week.
- White non-Hispanic or Latino, single race individuals were the most likely to report exercising at least three times per week (58.1 percent) when compared with all other race/ethnic groups.
- Males (59.4 percent) were more likely to report exercising at least three times per week than females (52.1 percent).
- Individuals with some college were the most likely (61.1 percent) to report exercising at least three times per week.
- Individuals with the highest income (over 400 percent of the poverty line) were the most likely to report exercising at least three times per week (60.6 percent).
- Individuals with public only health insurance were the least likely (40.8 percent) to report exercising at least three times per week.

Sex

Males, compared with females, were more likely to report exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more. For males, 59.4 percent reported exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more while 52.1 percent of females reported such (figure 3).

Education level

Individuals with some college were the most likely and individuals who did not graduate from high school were the least likely to report exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more. For individuals who completed at least some college, 61.1 percent reported exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more. This compares with 47.3 and 53.6 percent, respectively, for individuals who did not graduate from high school and did graduate from high school (figure 4).

Poverty status

Individuals with high incomes (over 400 percent of the poverty line) were the most likely to report exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more (60.6 percent). Individuals with middle incomes (over 200 percent through 400 percent of the poverty line) reported exercising somewhat less (55.7 percent). Individuals with lower incomes (less than or equal to the poverty line, over the poverty line through 125 percent of the poverty line, and over 125 percent through 200 percent of the poverty line) reported exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more, at 44.5, 46.9, and 51.1 percent, respectively (figure 5).

Health insurance status

Individuals with public only health insurance were the least likely to report exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more. Of those with public only health insurance, 40.8 percent reported exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more. This compares with 58.5 percent of individuals with private health insurance and 54.8 percent of individuals without health insurance reporting exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more (figure 6).

Data Source

The numbers shown in this Statistical Brief are drawn from analyses conducted by MEPS staff from the following 2002 full-year public use file: HC-070.

Definitions/Methodology

Exercise

Exercise was defined as adults 18 and older spending half an hour or more in moderate or vigorous physical activity at least three times a week.

Age

The respondent was asked to report the age of each family member as of the date of each interview. In this report, age was usually based on the sample person's age at the end of the reference year. If data were not collected at the end of the year because the sample person was out of scope (e.g., deceased or institutionalized), then age at the time of the previous interview(s) was used.

Race/ethnicity

Classification by race and ethnicity was based on information reported for each family member. Respondents were asked if each family member's race was best described as American Indian, Alaska Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, black, white, or other. They also were asked if each family member's main national origin or ancestry was Puerto Rican; Cuban; Mexican, Mexicano, Mexican American, or Chicano; other Latin American; or other Spanish. All persons whose main national origin or ancestry was reported in one of these Hispanic groups, regardless of racial background, were classified as Hispanic or Latino. Since the Hispanic or Latino grouping can include black Hispanic or Latino, white Hispanic or Latino, and other Hispanic or Latino, the race categories of black, white, and other do not include Hispanic or Latino. Other non-Hispanic or Latino includes American Indian/Alaskan Native non-Hispanic or Latino, Asian or Pacific Islander non-Hispanic or Latino and multiple races non-Hispanic or Latino.

Education level

Respondents were asked to report the highest grade or year of schooling ever completed by each family member as of the date of the interview: not a high school graduate, high school graduate, and some college.

Poverty status

Each sample person was classified according to the total yearly income of his or her family. Within a household, all individuals related by blood, marriage, or adoption were considered to be a family. Personal income from all family members was summed to create family income. Poverty status is the ratio of family income to the Federal poverty thresholds, which control for family size and age of the head of family. Categories are defined as follows:

- Poor: Persons in families with income less than or equal to the poverty line, including those who reported negative income
- Near poor: Persons in families with income over the poverty line through 125 percent of the poverty line
- Low income: Persons in families with income over 125 percent through 200 percent of the poverty line
- Middle income: Persons in families with income over 200 percent through 400 percent of the poverty line
- High income: Persons in families with income over 400 percent of the poverty line

Health insurance status

- Private coverage: Private health insurance coverage was defined as non-public insurance that provided coverage for hospital and physician care (including Medigap coverage).
- Public only coverage: People were considered to have public only health insurance coverage if they were not covered by private insurance, and they were covered by Medicare, Medicaid, TRICARE, or other public hospital and physician coverage.
- Uninsured: People who did not have insurance coverage at any time during the survey year were classified as uninsured. People who were covered only by noncomprehensive State-specific programs (e.g., Maryland Kidney Disease Program) or private single service plans (e.g., coverage for dental or vision care only, coverage for accidents or specific diseases) were considered to be uninsured.

About MEPS-HC

MEPS-HC is a nationally representative longitudinal survey that collects detailed information on health care utilization and expenditures, health insurance, and health status, as well as a wide variety of social, demographic, and economic characteristics for the civilian noninstitutionalized population. It is cosponsored by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and the National Center for Health Statistics.

For more information about MEPS, call the MEPS information coordinator at AHRQ (301-427-1406) or visit the MEPS Web site at <http://www.meps.ahrq.gov/>.

References

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health*. Atlanta, Ga.: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 1996.

For more information on what can be done to improve health, see AHRQ's *The Pocket Guide to Good Health for Adults*, which is available at <http://www.ahrq.gov/ppip/adguide/>.

For a detailed description of the MEPS-HC survey design, sample design, and methods used to minimize sources on nonsampling error, see the following publications:

Cohen, J. *Design and Methods of the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey Household Component*. MEPS Methodology Report No. 1. AHCPH Pub. No. 97-0026. Rockville, Md.: Agency for Health Care Policy and Research, 1997.

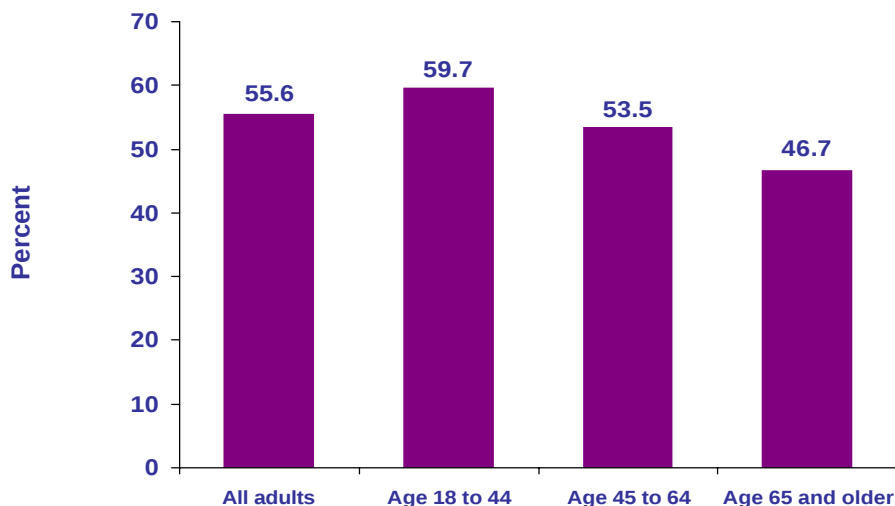
Cohen, S. *Sample Design of the 1996 Medical Expenditure Panel Survey Household Component*. MEPS Methodology Report No. 2. AHCPR Pub. No. 97-0027. Rockville, Md.: Agency for Health Care Policy and Research, 1997.

Cohen, S. Design Strategies and Innovations in the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey. *Medical Care*, July 2003: 41(7) Supplement: III-5–III-12.

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Figure 1. Percentage exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more, age 18 and older, by age

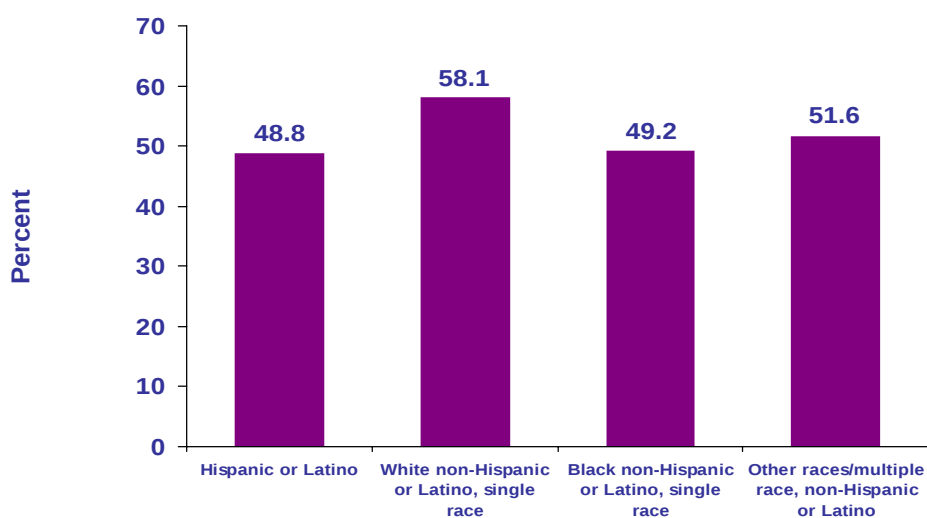


Note: The age group age 18 to 44 was the most likely to report exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more.

Source: Center for Financing, Access, and Cost Trends, AHRQ, Household Component of the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, 2002



Figure 2. Percentage exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more, age 18 and older, by race/ethnicity

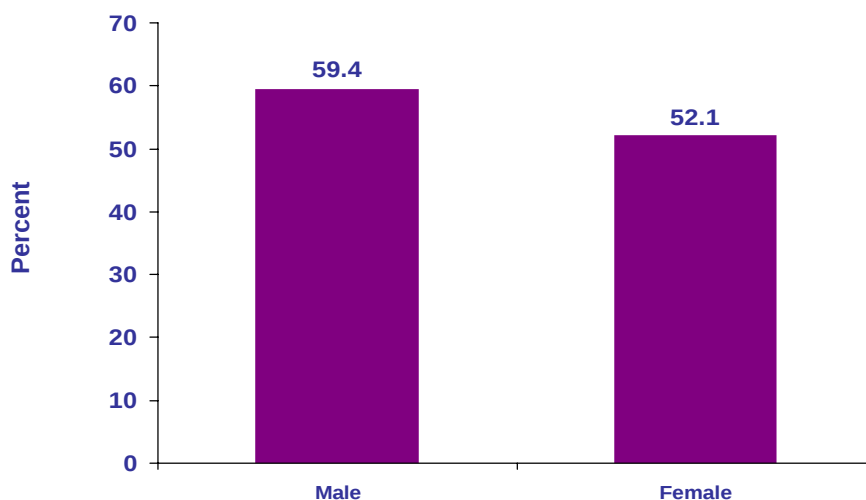


Note: White non-Hispanic or Latino, single race were the most likely to report exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more.

Source: Center for Financing, Access, and Cost Trends, AHRQ, Household Component of the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, 2002



Figure 3. Percentage exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more, age 18 and older, by sex

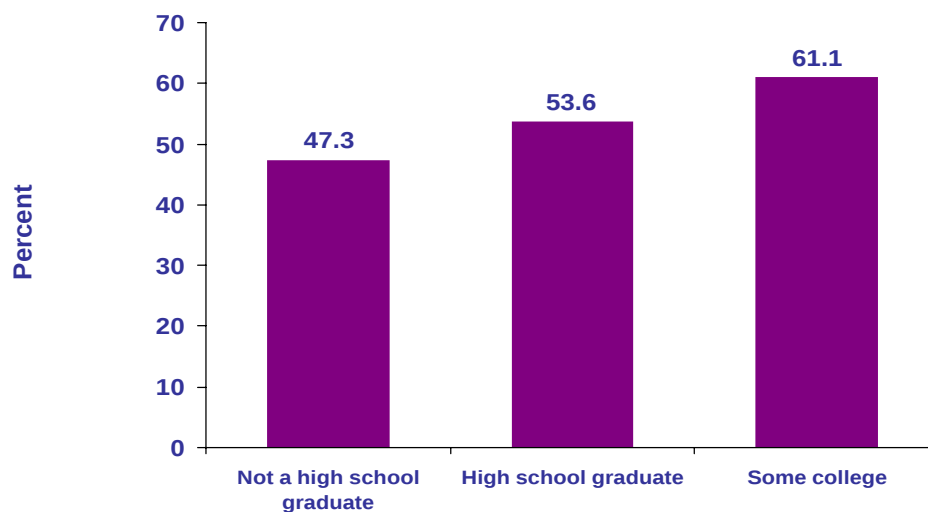


Note: Males were more likely to report exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more.

Source: Center for Financing, Access, and Cost Trends, AHRQ, Household Component of the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, 2002



Figure 4. Percentage exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more, age 18 and older, by education level

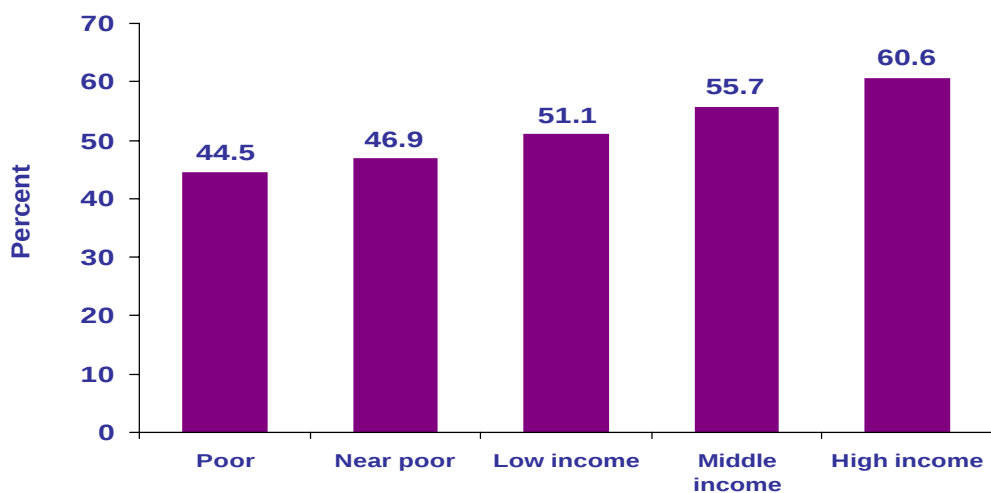


Note: Individuals with some college were the most likely to report exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more.

Source: Center for Financing, Access, and Cost Trends, AHRQ, Household Component of the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, 2002



Figure 5. Percentage exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more, age 18 and older, by poverty status

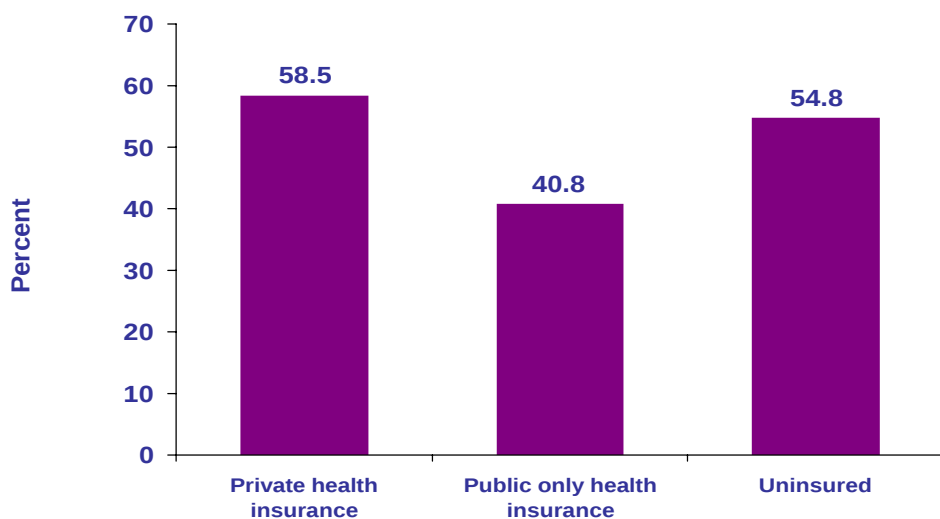


Note: Individuals with higher incomes were more likely to report exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more.

Source: Center for Financing, Access, and Cost Trends, AHRQ, Household Component of the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, 2002



Figure 6. Percentage exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more, age 18 and older, by health insurance status



Note: Individuals with public only health insurance were the least likely to report exercising at least three times a week for half an hour or more.

Source: Center for Financing, Access, and Cost Trends, AHRQ, Household Component of the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, 2002

