



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FACT SHEET



Physical Activity and Changing Lifestyles

Traditionally, Aboriginal¹ peoples led healthy, active lifestyles that included daily activities such as hunting, fishing, and food gathering and preparation. Other common activities included traditional games and competitions such as lacrosse, wrestling, running, canoeing, archery, dancing, storytelling and singing. These activities helped Aboriginal peoples maintain physical strength, fitness and health throughout all life stages from childhood to old age.

Although these types of activities are still practiced in Aboriginal communities, many Aboriginal people today have become much less physically active. In many Aboriginal communities, both on and off reserve, the loss of traditional lifestyles has gone hand-in-hand with a decrease in physical activity and an increase

in health problems that were unheard of in traditional Aboriginal communities: obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, addictions and substance abuse.²

Health research focused on Aboriginal peoples has shown that lifestyle changes, lack of physical activity, and obesity are contributing factors in the significant increase of chronic disease such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes in Aboriginal communities.³ According to the 2008-10 First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey, only 26% of First Nations adults and 47% of youth get the minimum of 30 minutes of moderate or vigorous physical activity every day that is required to maintain a healthy level of fitness.⁴ Other research focused on physical activity levels of off-reserve First Nation, Inuit, and Métis people shows that, although off-reserve First Nation and Métis people tend to be more active in their leisure time than non-Aboriginal people, the rates of physical activity

among Inuit people are comparable with non-Aboriginal people.⁵ However, in all population groups – First Nation, Inuit, and Métis, as well as non-Aboriginal – physical activity is associated with better overall health.

Getting Active, Staying Healthy

Canada's *Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living* recommends 30-60 minutes of moderate exercise a day to maintain and improve health. Regular physical activity has many benefits – it reduces stress, builds strength, increases energy and helps to prevent and control chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease, diabetes mellitus, hypertension, obesity, bone and joint diseases (e.g. osteoporosis and osteoarthritis).⁶ It can also reduce depression, help prevent cancer, and avoid premature death⁷ The 2008-10 First Nations Regional Health Survey found that individuals who were active were more likely to report having excellent



health, being of normal weight, having fewer health conditions, consuming vegetables and fruit several times a day, consuming traditional foods, having good support, feeling in balance, and having a high positive and low negative emotional score.⁸ Other benefits include better sleep, increased self-esteem, reduced anxiety, and an overall improvement in mental well-being.⁹ For children and youth specifically, physical activity can increase opportunities for peer interaction and decrease loneliness.¹⁰

Tips to get active

Canada's *Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living* recommends trying to be a little more active each day by doing healthy activities that you are familiar with and that you enjoy. If you haven't been active in a while, it is important to start slowly and

gradually progress towards physical activity goals that are meaningful to you. Involving friends and family in daily physical activity sessions is also a good way to socialize and stay motivated.

Positive habits are built early in life, so children should be encouraged to get at least one hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day, and doing strengthening activities that build muscles and bones at least three times a week. Get your children active by reducing screen time (television and computer) and encouraging them to play active games, dance to their favourite music, and ride a bike, skateboard or walk to school. Kids can help around the home by raking leaves, shoveling snow, carrying groceries and helping with other chores. School sports teams are an excellent way for kids to stay active and build positive

social relationships with others in the community. Find out what activities your kids enjoy, and make it a family priority to spend time being active with your kids.

For adults just starting to get active, choose a variety of physical activities that you enjoy and start to build routines around these activities. You can start slowly with 10 minute sessions, and build from there until you reach a minimum of 2.5 hours of physical activity each week. Limit the amount of time you spend watching TV or sitting in front of a computer, and find someone to plan activities with. Having a walking, jogging or working out partner can be a great motivator to get active. Remember that every step counts, and as you build new habits you will start to enjoy the many benefits of being physically active.





For more information

There are many organizations across Canada that support physical activity, from organized sport and coaching to advice on how to be more active each day.

- Aboriginal Physical Activity and Cultural Circle (APACC) – A network for Aboriginal people who are involved in sports, recreation, fitness and traditional activities.
<http://www.a-pacc.com/>
- Aboriginal Walk this Way
<http://parc.ophea.net/wtw-aboriginal-adaptation>
- Aboriginal Youth FIRST
<http://www.youthfirst.ca/>
- Active Circle: Pathways for active Aboriginal youth
<http://www.activecircle.ca/en/home>
- Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pa-ap/index-eng.php>
- “Come Meet the Challenge” – Physical Activity and Nutrition Initiatives in Aboriginal Communities resource guide
<http://www.niichro.com/2004/pdf/cmc-eng-binder.pdf>
- First Nations Health Council. Adult First Nations Fitness video
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMfMkT6FaSY>
- First Nations Health Council. Bear Workout: First Nation Fitness video for children
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBso9ZmDPeI>
- Gen7
<http://www.motivatecanada.ca/en/gen7>
- Heart & Stroke Foundation of BC & Yukon “Tips to get physically active”
http://www.heartandstroke.bc.ca/site/c/kpIPKXOyFmG/b.3644691/k.5EB7/Healthy_Living_Tips_to_get_physically_active.htm
- North American Indigenous Games
<http://www.museevirtuel-virtualmuseum.ca/sgc-cms/expositions-exhibitions/traditions/English/index.html>
- Participaction -
<http://www.participaction.com/en-us/Home.aspx>

Endnotes

- ¹ In the context of this fact sheet, the term 'Aboriginal' is used broadly to refer to the Indigenous inhabitants of Canada, including First Nations (whether they be status/non-status or live on or off reserve), Métis and Inuit. Wherever possible, we provide information for distinct groups/communities.
- ² Foulds, H.J.A, Bredin, S.S.D., & Warburton, D.E.R. (2011). An evaluation of the physical activity and health status of British Columbian Aboriginal populations. *Applied Physiology, Nutrition and Metabolism*, 37: 127-137; Dacipe, A.N. (2006). The Medicine Wheel. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 17:251.
- ³ Harris, S.B., Zinnan, B., Hanley, A., Gittelsohn, J., Hegele, R., Connelly, P.W., Shah, B., & Hux, J.E. (2002). The impact of diabetes on cardiovascular risk factors and outcomes in a Native Canadian population. *Diabetes Research and Clinical Practice*, 55:165-173.
- ⁴ The First Nations Information Governance Centre (2012). *First Nations Regional Health Survey (RHS) Phase 2 (2008/10) National report on adults, youth and children living in First Nations communities*. Ottawa, ON: The First Nations Information Governance Centre.
- ⁵ Findlay, L.C. (2011). Physical activity among First Nations people off reserve, Métis and Inuit. *Health Reports*, 22(1). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 82-003-XPE.
- ⁶ Warburton, D.E.R., Nicol, C.W., & Bredin, S.S.D. (2006). Health benefits of physical activity: The evidence. *CMAJ*, 174(6): 801-809.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ The First Nations Information Governance Centre (2012).
- ⁹ Fox, K. (1999). The influence of physical activity on mental well-being. *Public Health Nutrition*, 2(3a): 411-418.
- ¹⁰ Page, R.M., Frey, J., Talbert, R., & Falk, C. (1992). Children's feelings of loneliness and social dissatisfaction: Relationship to measures of physical fitness and activity. *Journal of Teaching and Physical Education*, 11: 211-219.



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