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Routine Active and Sedentary Behavior Patterns in U.S. Adults

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Parents are key influencers of physical activity in their children (Hohepa, Scragg, Schofield, Kolt, & Schaaf, 2007; Ornelas, Perreira, & Ayala, 2007). Building moderate-intensity physical activity into the daily routine may help parents model this desirable behavior for their children. Reducing the time spent in parental sedentary behaviors, such as television watching or computer use, may also serve as a model for children to use time appropriately.

Serving as a role model for children is a further reason for adults to engage in regular physical activity, in addition to its contribution to one's own health, sense of well-being, and maintenance of a healthy body weight. In contrast, sedentary lifestyles are associated with increased risk for overweight and obesity and many chronic diseases. For these reasons, the *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Agriculture) recommend that individuals engage in regular physical activity and reduce sedentary activities.

To determine typical patterns of physically active and sedentary behaviors as part of daily routines among U.S. adults, this study examined the reported frequency and time spent in two routine physical activities and time spent in two sedentary behaviors.

Methods

Frequency and time spent in routine active and sedentary behaviors were estimated using data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2005-2006 (NHANES 2005-2006). NHANES is a continuing, cross-sectional, nationally representative survey of the U.S. noninstitutionalized civilian population, which employs a complex, stratified, multistage, probability sample design. Self-reported responses were used to examine the routine activity patterns of all adults age 19 or older (n=5,113), and by age-gender groups (19-30, 31-50, and 51 and older). Weighted data were analyzed using SAS® 9.1 to provide a nationally representative population distribution. Questions used for the analyses included

frequency and/or average amount of time spent in each of the following activities in the past 30 days:

- Walking or bicycling to work, to school, or to do errands.
- Engaging in moderate or higher intensity household task (such as mowing the lawn or heavy cleaning) for more than 10 minutes.
- Sitting and watching television or videos.
- Using a computer or playing computer games, outside of work.

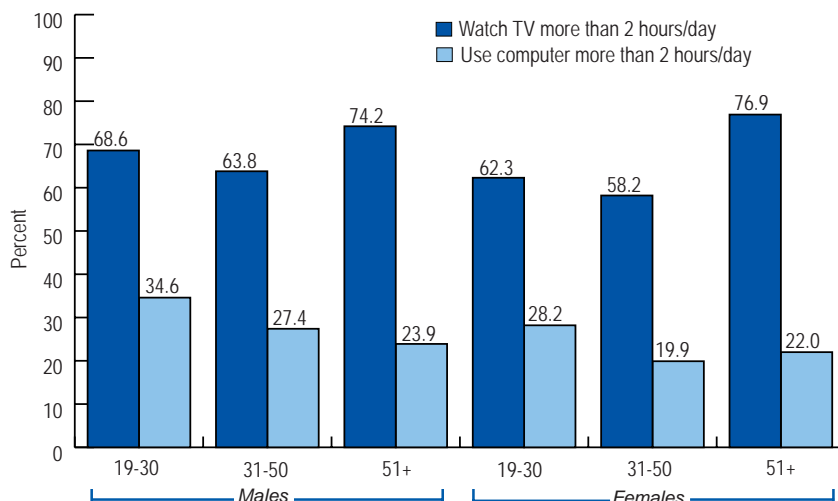
Results

Approximately three-quarters (73.8 percent) of adults (ages 19 and older) reported that they had not walked or bicycled to work or school or to do errands in the past 30 days. Of the one-quarter (26.2 percent) who had commuted via walking or biking, most (21.9 percent) did so at least once a week, on average (≥ 4 times a month). However, only about one in ten (9.6 percent of all adults) did so five or more times per week (≥ 20 times a month).

While about 70 percent of all adults reported that, at some point in the last 30 days, they had engaged in moderate or higher intensity household tasks for at least 10 minutes, most did so twice a week or less. The median number of times reported was six per month. Three-quarters of all adults reported doing at least 10 minutes of these physically active household chores less than three times per week (≤ 13 times per month) and only 10 percent reported doing these chores daily (≥ 30 times per month).

A much larger percentage of adults reported that they spent time in sedentary behaviors on a daily basis. About two-thirds of all adults (67.5 percent) reported watching TV or videos an average of 2 hours or more per day in the past 30 days. In addition, a quarter of adults (25.2 percent) used a computer outside of work or played computer games an average of 2 hours or more per day. The figure shows the percent of adults, by age-gender group, who reported that in the past 30 days

Figure. Percent of adults, by age-gender group, who spent more than 2 hours per day watching television or videos, or using a computer outside of work, in the past 30 days.



they spent 2 or more hours per day watching television or videos, and who reported using a computer outside of work for 2 or more hours a day. In every age-gender group, the majority of adults reported an average of 2 or more hours per day sitting and watching television.

Discussion

As shown by these results, the typical daily behavior pattern for most adults in the United States includes several hours a day in sedentary behaviors, such as watching TV and/or using the computer. In contrast, it is not the norm for U.S. adults to walk or bicycle to work or school or to do errands as part of their daily routine, or to do more than 10 minutes or more of physically active household chores on a daily basis. These patterns of behavior serve as models for many children—that being sedentary is the norm and that being physically active is not. Note that this analysis did not include time spent in leisure-time physical activities, including sports, walking or running, or exercising. These leisure-time activities may also serve as positive models for children’s behavior patterns.


Adults should be encouraged to decrease the amount of time they spend in sedentary activities and increase time being physically active every day. These changes are important not

only for personal health, but as a role model for children’s behavior patterns.

References

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