

# Physical Activity Survey Methodology

Summary Report No 3 2005

- **South Australian adults were surveyed in September 2004 as to the levels and characteristics of their physical activity.**
- **Questions developed by Active Australia were used to measure leisure time physical activity and calculate whether that activity was sufficient to produce a health benefit.**
- **Measures were also taken of work related activity, and time spent sitting.**

## Introduction

The SA Physical Activity Survey 2004 is one part of a system that monitors levels of physical activity in adult South Australians. This system includes a regular series of surveys that monitor trends in physical activity every three years. Core questions are supplemented at different times with investigations of specific types or categories of physical activity. Together they form a data collection of detailed and consistent measures of physical activity over time. The information is of benefit to a wide range of users, from health related organisations, to sports and recreation organisations, academics, and the general public.

This brief report describes how the 2004 data were collected, and provides information on how it is being disseminated. A website is provided so that people wishing to explore more deeply into the issue can be directed to other resources, including contacting people who are available to help.

## Computer aided telephone interviewing

The SA Physical Activity Survey 2004 was commissioned by the Physical Activity Council. The data were collected by the SA Department of Health using the services of the Population Research and Outcome Studies Unit.

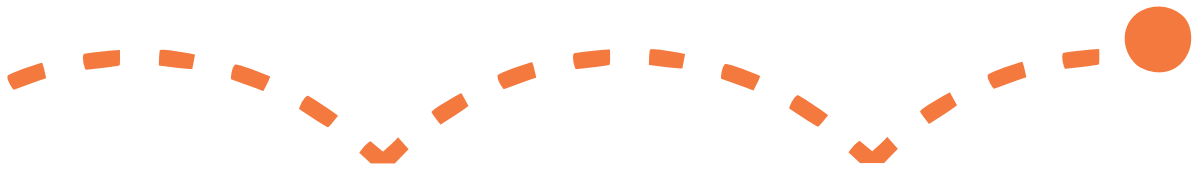
A random sample of 2999 South Australians aged 18 years and over was interviewed by telephone using CATI (Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing). The sample was drawn from the White Pages telephone directory. The topic areas of the survey are described below and detailed results are available in other brief reports.

## Leisure time physical activity

The survey questions are built around a module of ten questions that sum up leisure time physical activity (see Box 1). Leisure time physical activity has been shown to be a good proxy measure for total physical activity in an individual. These questions were developed by the AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) for the National Active Australia Physical Activity Survey 1997, and have been used extensively since that time. From these questions a measure is calculated that represents the level of physical activity considered sufficient to achieve a health benefit. This is done by combining the amount of vigorous activity, walking and other moderate intensity activities. This summary measure is referred to as SPA (Sufficient Physical Activity, see Box 2).

## Box 1 - Active Australia Physical Activity questions

1. In the last week, how many times have you walked continuously, for at least 10 minutes, for recreation, exercise or to get to or from places?
2. What do you estimate was the total time that you spent walking in this way in the last week?
3. This question excludes household chores or gardening. In the last week, how many times did you do any vigorous physical activity which made you breathe harder or puff and pant? (e.g. tennis, jogging, cycling, keep fit exercises)
4. What do you estimate was the total time that you spent doing this vigorous physical activity in the last week?
5. This question excludes household chores or gardening. In the last week, how many times did you do any other more moderate physical activities that you have not already mentioned? (e.g. lawn bowls, golf, gentle swimming)
6. What do you estimate was the total time that you spent doing these activities in the last week?
7. The next question does not include gardening. In the last week, how many times did you do vigorous household chores which made you breathe harder or puff and pant?
8. What do you estimate was the total time you spent doing these vigorous household chores in the last week?
9. In the last week, how many times did you do any vigorous gardening or heavy yard work around the yard which made you breathe harder or puff and pant?
10. What do you estimate was the total time that you spent doing vigorous gardening or heavy yard work around the yard in the last week?



## Box 2 - Calculation of Sufficient Physical Activity (SPA)

In order to benefit their health, people are encouraged to accumulate 30 minutes of moderate or greater intensity physical activity on most days of the week. This public health prescription reflects the recommendations made in the 1996 US Surgeon General's Report on physical activity, and has since been transformed into the National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians.

Accumulating 30 minutes of moderate or greater intensity physical activity on most days of the week has been interpreted as 150 minutes per week (30 minutes on 5 days). The standard definition of SPA is therefore:

- SPA is calculated as the completion of 150 minutes of walking, moderate and vigorous activity (with vigorous multiplied by 2 to account for its greater intensity) in the past week.
- The total times spent in these activities are derived from questions 2, 4 and 6 of the Active Australia physical activity questions (see Box 1).
- Another definition that is used includes the definition above with the proviso that the time must be accumulated over 5 sessions (thereby using the data collected by questions 1, 3 and 5).

### Other activities

The 2004 state survey extended the data collection from the previous surveys in 1998 and 2001. These previous surveys concentrated on the measurement of leisure time physical activity. In 2004 the survey investigated two other important components of our waking hours; physical activity as part of our work, and time spent sitting or being sedentary. The questions on physical activity at work are from the IPAQ (International Physical Activity Questionnaire) long form. These will provide a more complete picture of time spent being active, and inactive, through the day.

A section of eight questions addressed cycling as a form of physical activity. Data were collected on how often people cycle, and for people who cycled in the last week the amount of time they rode. Cycling for transport and recreation were separately measured. Attitudes toward factors that would encourage people to cycle more were recorded.

Respondents reported the specific recreational or sporting activities they did in the last week, giving a picture of the popularity of various pursuits. Following this were their attitudes toward changing their behaviour to be more physically active. Combined, these data show what people are currently doing and what they are trying to or want to do. Barriers to being more active include negative self body image, and respondents were asked about this. This was part of a brief investigation of factors that influence how much people like to be physically active.

### Conclusion

During 2005 a number of brief reports showing these and other results from the 2004 survey will be released. Some will contain comparisons of results from the 1998 and 2001 surveys as well. Other publications will be available and details of these will be available on the website. The results are being used to inform South Australian policy directions as they relate to physical activity. Further information the full report and questionnaire are available at [www.beactive.com.au](http://www.beactive.com.au)

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