PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Regular physical activity is critical for people of all ages to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight, prevent chronic disease, and promote psychological well-being. In older adults, physical activity also helps to prevent falls and improve cognitive functioning.\(^1\) The 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans state that for substantial health benefits, adults should engage in at least 2½ hours per week of moderate intensity (e.g. brisk walking or gardening) or 1¼ hours per week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity (e.g. jogging or kick-boxing), or an equivalent combination of both, plus muscle-strengthening activities on at least 2 days per week. Additional health benefits are gained by engaging in physical activity beyond this amount.\(^1\)

In 2007–2009, 14.7 percent of women met the recommendations for adequate physical activity, compared to 21.1 percent of men. In every age group, women were less likely than men to meet the recommendations for adequate physical activity. For both men and women, the percentage reporting adequate physical activity generally decreased as age increased.

Adequate physical activity also varied by poverty status and race and ethnicity. Overall, women with household incomes of 200 percent or more of poverty were more than twice as likely to report adequate physical activity than those with incomes below 200 percent of poverty (18.8 versus 8.6 percent, respectively; data not shown). This income difference was observed within each racial and ethnic group.

Overall, non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic women of multiple races, and non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native women reported the highest levels of adequate physical activity (16.9, 16.0, and 14.9 percent, respectively). Fewer non-Hispanic Black, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic Asian women reported engaging in adequate physical activity (9.4, 9.5, and 10.3 percent, respectively). These racial and ethnic differences occurred within both income groups.