Provincial exercise survey shows Albertans lacking physical activity

Michelle Mark
ONLINE REPORTER/DPARTMENT

Although Albertans are gradually becoming more physically active, more than 60 per cent of them still need to go the extra mile, says a newly-released report from the University of Alberta’s Centre for Active Living.

The 2003 Alberta Survey on Physical Activity found that even though 94 per cent of Albertans recognize physical activity will prevent them from developing certain health problems, only 55 per cent actually participate in enough physical activity to gain these advantages.

Christina Loitz, a U of A researcher and co-author of the report, said it was nice to see the numbers rise to 59 per cent from the 54 per cent in the 2001 version of the report, but added there are still actions Albertans can take to improve.

"The thing is, it’s not significantly different, but it is still a positive trend," she said.

"Basically we’ve maintained our physical activity level as Albertans for the last 10 years, so that’s a good thing knowing that our population has aged during that time.

The report surveyed more than 1,200 Albertans, and examined several factors involved in their resistance to participate in physical activity, as well as indicating possible recommendations to boost the 59 per cent of those Albertans who are currently getting enough exercise.

Loitz said having a lack of confidence was one of the main reasons explaining why Albertans have been avoiding physical activity, reasoning that people may become more realistic if they committed to making physical activity a regular habit.

"A lot of people that aren’t active don’t have confidence that they can be physically active when there’s bad weather, or they’re feeling tired, or they’re in a bad mood," she said.

"We have a hard time coping with those situations."

"If there’s bad weather outside, some people might throw in the towel and say ‘I’m not going to work out today,’ whereas someone else might say, ‘Oh, well maybe I’ll go on the track in the cink and run around there instead of running outside today’ That wouldn’t be an example of someone who had good coping mechanisms for things that they might not expect,” she added.

The report also came up with several predictors of physical activity noting the different sociodemographic, psychological and environmental causes that may help foresee Albertans’ physical activity levels.

Of these, Loitz described age as one of the most important predictors of physical activity.

"We can predict that when you get older you’re likely going to be less active than when you were younger,” she said.

"There’s lots of reasons that that can occur, but if we try to get physical activity to be a habit at the younger years, and they’ve (seen) that over the mid-life time, we can maybe continue on that in the older adult age."

"So trying to make physical activity a part of your life as early on, and make it normal and culturally normal for you and the people around you might be one way to maintain physical activity levels."

Loitz clarified that the physical activity doesn’t have to be exhausting, like playing sports or running a marathon — even activities like walking can contribute.

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Christina Loitz
University of Alberta

events listings

Walking With Our Sisters - Beading Session
Jan. 16, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.
North Powerplant - Aboriginal Student Council space

Shouting in the Dark: Bahrain
Jan. 17, 5 p.m. – 7 p.m.
Tory 1 91

Medicine Centennial Launch
Jan. 17, 1:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Bernard Snell Hall, Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre

Winter Term Registration Deadline
Jan. 18

Undergraduate Registrations Period
For Auditing Winter Term Courses
Jan. 21 – Jan. 25

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