

# Activity Check-In

Impact of seasonal changes  
on sport and physical activity



**The Activity Check-In tracks behaviours and attitudes from both adults, children and young people towards sport and physical activity, revealing the impacts of a rapidly changing world.**

**Each wave captures views on a specific topic of current relevance – in this publication we focus on how activity levels and choice of activities differ between the seasons.**

**Full data sets are available on our website.**

In this report we explore how activity levels and choice of activities differ as the seasons change, and help individuals, communities, and organisations make informed decisions to promote year-round physical well-being.

## Contents

- 3 Context
- 4 Changes to habits and behaviours
- 5 Motivation and barriers
- 6 Challenges in tackling inequalities

Wave 6 of the Activity Check-In was conducted via an online survey completed by n=2,067 adults (aged 16+).

All participants were from England and data has been weighted to be representative of the English population by age, gender, region, disability and socio-economic status. By socio-economic status we mean social grade, classified as follows; Upper (A), Middle (B/C1/C2), Lower (D/E).

Data was collected between 31st March and 3rd April 2023.





# Context

**In this report we shed light on how attitudes towards physical activities change with the seasons, and the differences in activity levels during the year.**

There is a 4% decrease in adult participation in any type of activity during the winter months compared to the summer months, resulting in a decline of 1.8 million adults.

Active Lives data indicates that the greatest activity level swings are seen in men, those aged 16-44 and all ethnic minorities barring Chinese.

Certain activities show distinct patterns based on the seasons. Activities like walking, whether it's for leisure or travel, cycling, and swimming become less popular in the winter months compared to the spring and summer seasons.

However, some activities seem to be resistant to changes in seasons. Engaging in activities at home, running, and fitness-related activities outside of home environments, such as gyms, don't seem to be affected by the time of the year.



# Changes to habits and behaviours

- Just under half of adults say that they are less active, in general, during the winter months.
- Weather and dark conditions play a big part in a decline in winter activity, and motivation in general takes a hit with 70% of adults who do less saying they find activity less enjoyable during this period.
- Interestingly, 66% of adults who do less activity in winter say that they recognise it's important to continue to be active – but don't have the motivation to do it.
- Re-establishing routines after a dip in activity during winter is a challenge for just under half of adults who did less during the winter months.
- Two of the main reasons cited were 'getting going again after a disruption' and 'decreased levels of fitness making it difficult to start again' alongside ongoing weather challenges.
- Of those who do manage to maintain, or even increase, activity levels during winter, existing habits, a desire to stay fit year round and continuing routine are the biggest motivators, whilst just over 2 in 5 focus on winter specific benefits (such as mental health improvements) to keep them going.





## Motivation and barriers

- People who intend to stay active during the winter usually follow through with their plans. Just under 3 out of 5 individuals (57%) mentioned that they carry out their activity plans 'most or all' of the time, and 28% said they do so 'sometimes'.
- Those who do follow through with their plans are mainly motivated by emotions, like - reminding themselves that they'll feel better afterwards, plus viewing it as important despite the weather conditions.
- For those who go ahead with their planned activities, it tends to be a positive experience. Around 84% of them reported feeling positive emotions like satisfaction, pride, and a sense of worth when they successfully completed their planned activities.
- The most common reasons that stop activity plans from happening are feeling tired and not wanting to deal with the harsh winter conditions.



# Challenges in tackling inequalities

- During the winter months, women are more likely to say that they do less activity, however this does not come through as a change in actual activity levels in Activity Check-In or Active Lives data.
- The conditions are the top barrier cited for both men and women to staying active in the winter – women experience more barriers related to their previous experiences during the winter months (including motivation), while men face more barriers related to opportunities for staying active.
- Women are significantly more likely to cite feeling less safe being active in the dark (25%) than men (12%).
- 75% of women who do less in the winter say that they lack the motivation to stay active in winter, even though they understand its importance, compared to 54% of men.
- People living in the least deprived areas are more likely to say they are doing less in the winter months than those most deprived areas. Conversely, adults living in the most deprived areas (21%) are most likely to say that they are doing more activity in the winter months.
- For adults 'not going ahead with planned activity', safety concerns are cited by half of all adults and are the second most common reason. This rises to 64% for Asian adults.