

Activity Check-In

How life challenges
shape 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 the impact of life challenges on sport and physical activity.

Full data sets are available on our website.

This document is for partners and organisations working across the sport and physical activity sector. It shares insights from the Activity Check-In on how life challenges influence people’s ability to be active, and how everyday activities such as work, caring and household tasks fit into their overall activity levels.

Contents

- 3 Context
- 5 Daily life
- 6 Barriers and motivations
- 7 Hidden physical activity
 - Household tasks
 - Caring responsibilities
 - Work and study
- 11 Common experiences
- 12 Opportunities
- 13 Methodology



Context

Activity levels are lower among adults facing life challenges – pressures in everyday life that reduce people’s time, stability, energy or confidence to be active.

These can include financial strain, caring responsibilities, insecure housing, poor mental wellbeing, or experiences of exclusion or discrimination.

Those experiencing 2 or more life challenges are less likely to do three or more days of sport and physical activity a week compared to those with none or just one life challenge (47% compared to 58%).

Life challenges can take many forms and often overlap. They influence people’s routines, the support available to them, and the extent to which physical activity feels possible or realistic.

These challenges are part of the wider inequalities that shape experiences of an active life.

In this research, we explored life challenges through three broad lenses:

1. Personal pressures

Pressures that affect emotional wellbeing or personal capacity – such as anxiety about the future, caring for others, managing addiction, or living in unsafe or unstable conditions.



2. Practical pressures

Pressures linked to money, resources or logistics – such as struggling to make ends meet, difficulty planning ahead financially, limited support for basic needs, or reliance on others for digital access.

3. Inclusion pressures

Feeling unfairly treated due to protected characteristics or struggling with English, which can limit confidence and belonging.

These pressures intersect with other factors linked to inequalities:

- Housing: 66% of adults experiencing at least one life challenge rent their home (vs 31% overall).
- Work: 37% are not currently working (vs 11% overall), which can increase caring and household pressures.
- Multiple life challenges: 31% are from lower social groups (vs 27% of all adults).

Understanding these pressures helps build a more empathetic and holistic picture of how people navigate daily life – and why many forms of activity may feel out of reach.

It also helps stakeholders understand why everyday activity, such as household tasks or work routines, plays a significant role for many.



Daily life

Over half of adults (57%) make some kind of adjustment to fit sport and physical activity into their daily life – such as waking up earlier, staying up later, or using personal downtime.

Those facing life challenges are more likely than average to make adjustments (66% vs 47% without challenges).

Those who make adjustments tend to be more active overall:

- 68% do sport and physical activity on 3+ days per week (vs 49% among those who do not).
- They are also more likely to be active early in the morning and evening, on both weekdays and weekends.

Everyday routines play a major role:

79% of adults adapt their daily routines to be more active – most commonly taking the stairs (44%) or walking/cycling instead of driving (37%).

Those facing life challenges are more likely to incorporate physical activity into household tasks (29%).



Barriers and motivations

While 56% of adults agree that sport and physical activity fit into their lifestyle, one in five disagree. Agreement is lower among lower social groups (48%) and renters (52%).

Motivation is a more common barrier among renters - with 16% of renters and 17% of those with life challenges lacking motivation or interest in being active.

Spending time with family and friends can both support and limit activity:

- 38% say it has a positive impact.
- 11% say it has a negative impact (rising to 14% among those with life challenges).
- 43% would rather socialise than exercise - higher again among those with life challenges (47%).

Religious activities (e.g., attending services or participating in faith-based practices) have a positive impact for 24% of adults and a negative impact for 9%.

Positive effects are more common among adults with life challenges, as well as higher social groups, renters and Muslim respondents.



Hidden physical activity

Many adults are active as part of their daily lives, even if this activity is not counted as sport. This includes household tasks, shopping, caring responsibilities and active work or study. These forms of activity can be important – especially for those facing multiple life challenges.

On their own, being active through daily life does not automatically increase overall participation. But when combined with the ability to make adjustments:

- Being active through daily life can support people to be active in their free time.
- When people are unable to make adjustments, being active through daily life can leave them too tired or time-pressed to be active outside of essential tasks.

This reflects the complex ways that pressure, time, energy and motivation interact in people's lives.

Over the following pages we explore how these different activities impact activity levels, particularly amongst those facing life challenges.



Household tasks

Household tasks are a major source of everyday activity. 64% of adults feel active through tasks such as cleaning (90%), laundry (72%), taking out rubbish (65%), cooking (56%), and DIY (49%).

These tasks affect people's ability to be active in different and sometimes conflicting ways – helping some people stay fit while leaving others too tired or time-pressed to be active in their free time.

Many feel household tasks support their fitness or confidence to be active:

- 34% say they support their ability to do sport and physical activity.
- 48% say household tasks help keep them fit enough to be active.
- 37% feel household tasks alone are enough to keep them fit (42% in lower social groups).

But, they can also limit free-time activity:

- 27% struggle to be active because they are already physically active through these tasks.
- This rises to 34% of those with at least 1 life challenge, 34% of renters and 37% of people in lower social groups.



Caring responsibilities

53% of adults are active through caring responsibilities¹
- rising to 67% among those not working.

Common activities include shopping or running errands (70%), doing household tasks for someone they care for (65%), personal care (41%), assisting with lifting or moving (47%), and playing with children or dependents (33%).

Those facing life challenges are more likely to say caring impacts on their activity levels - 36% say it has a positive impact and 20% report a negative impact (compared to 31% and 15% overall).

Among adults active through caring:

- 51% struggle to be active in free time.
- 57% feel caring keeps them fit.
- 60% say it helps them stay active overall.

¹ Caring responsibilities covers those who care for a friend/family member who either lives in the same household as themselves or who lives elsewhere.



Work and study

Work and study are important sources of daily activity. 39% of adults feel active through their job or education - less common among office or home-based workers and more common in physically demanding roles.

The impact on activity is mixed. Overall, 32% say work or study supports their ability to be active, while 17% say it limits it. These effects are more commonly reported by adults facing life challenges, reflecting the additional pressures they experience.

Among those active through work or study, 36% struggle to be active in their free time, usually due to tiredness or the need to rest. This rises to 43% among those with life challenges, and higher still among those from lower social groups.

At the same time, work activity can support fitness. 46% feel work or study activity is enough to keep them fit, and 54% feel able to do sport because work or study keeps them fit. Nearly 73% of those who feel fit enough are active on three or more days a week (vs 44% who disagree).

Motivation also plays a role: 60% say being active at work motivates them to be active outside work, and 55% feel they need to stay fit for their job. Sedentary time varies across roles but does not appear to affect overall participation.



Common experiences

Across all types of daily activity, the most common reason people struggle to be active in their free time is feeling too tired – reported by 42% of adults.

Many simply need time to rest and recover (37%), especially when work, caring and household responsibilities already demand physical or emotional energy.

People also describe wanting to use their limited free time for other things:

- 32% prefer to spend it on non-physical activities
- 27% say they don't have enough time
- 19% feel physical activity is less enjoyable after being active earlier in the day
- 19% don't feel they need to do more activity
- 15% worry about overexertion or injury

Together, these experiences highlight that even when people are active throughout the day, competing demands, fatigue and limited time can make additional sport and physical activity feel challenging.



Opportunities

Many adults experiencing life challenges are active as part of everyday life, but face barriers that limit formal sport and physical activity.

The sector can help by:

- Providing flexible and low-cost ways to be active around work, caring, and household responsibilities.
- Offering simple, enjoyable options that support motivation and help overcome fatigue.
- Considering how housing, workplaces, and community environments shape opportunities to be active.
- Recognising and reflecting everyday activity as part of an active lifestyle.
- Timing opportunities and messages to when people are most likely to be active - particularly early mornings and evenings - and acknowledging the activity many already do in their daily lives.



Methodology

This research was part of Wave 17 of the Activity Check-In, conducted between 13th-16th June 2025.

A boosted sample of 1,319 adults from DE respondents (lower social groups) was included to allow for detailed subgroup analysis. Boosted fieldwork ran until 2nd July 2025.

Questions on the impact of disadvantage were included alongside regular tracker questions.

Findings draw on nationally representative data, weighted to reflect the adult population in England.

Full [data tables](#) are available on the Sport England website.