

SPOTLIGHT
ON OLDER ADULTS AND THEIR
RELATIONSHIP WITH SPORT
AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Active Lives Adult Survey
November 2016-17

WELCOME

The relationship we have with sport and physical activity can vary significantly as we go through different stages in our lives.

Our Active Lives Adult Survey shows that someone's age can impact their likelihood to be active, with those aged 16-24 least likely to be inactive, those aged 85+ most likely to be inactive, and a clear trend in-between. Over half of all inactive people in England are aged 55 and over.

This report will delve deeper into the differences in inactivity levels at key life stages. Further Insight sections highlight other relevant research helping to explain the behaviour patterns. Talking Points sections provide context to the insight, exploring some of the possible reasons behind these behaviours.

We hope that this report can inform and help to shape approaches to support people to get active and remain active in a way that's right for them.

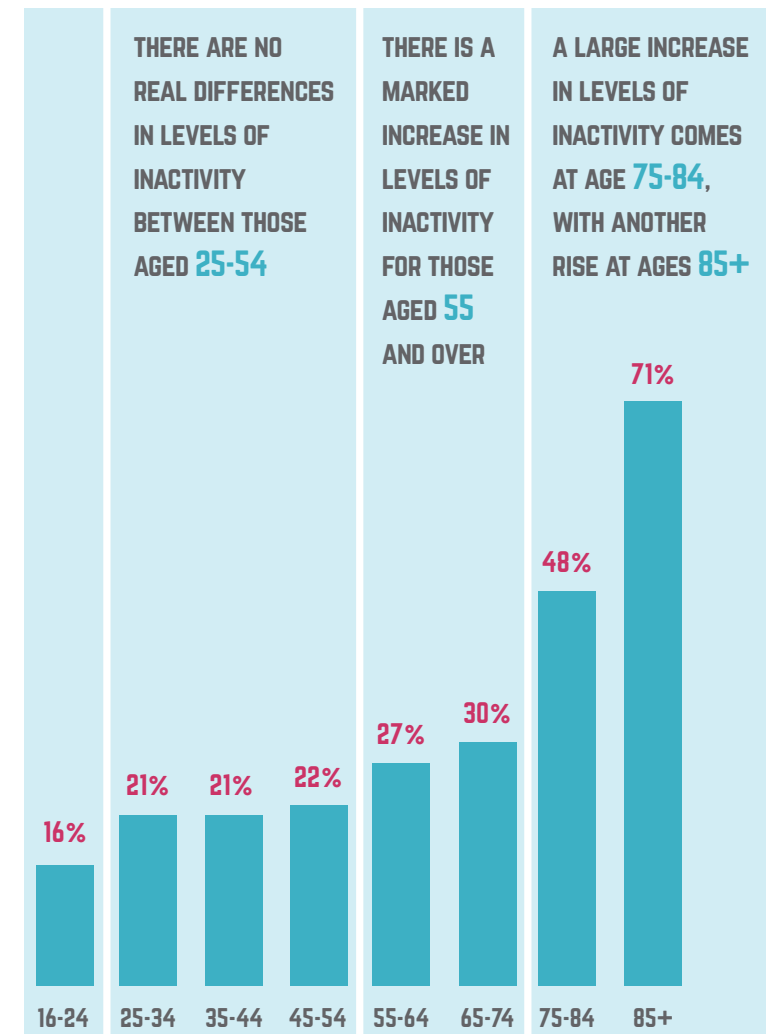
The course that ageing takes and the relationship with activity levels is not, and should not be, pre-determined.

How we age is shaped by our experiences and the way we live our lives. Helping people remain active for longer is a key component of healthy ageing.

It provides strength, stamina, suppleness, and skills that enable us to perform basic functions which can keep us mobile, provide a greater quality of life, and so help us to get older in the healthiest way possible.

THE HEADLINES

INACTIVE (LESS THAN 30 MINUTES A WEEK)



UNDERSTANDING THE AUDIENCE

Inactive people over the age of 55 represent a large and diverse group of roughly 6.4 million people. There are big differences across the age group and a 55 year-old might not have much in common with a 75 year-old, let alone a 95 year-old. There can also be big differences in perceptions, experiences, motivations and capabilities among people of the same age.

For example, we shouldn't assume older people have lots of free time. Many have responsibilities and demands on their time, such as caring for a partner, or children, volunteering or employment.

TALKING POINTS

Any intervention designed to support older people should avoid using chronological age alone when targeting or segmenting and recognise the existing behaviours, capabilities, unique barriers and motivators of their target group.

Time should be taken to really understand the audience and to talk to them to make sure their views are reflected in the project design.

A THIRD OF THE UK WORKFORCE WILL BE OVER 50 BY 2020

Office of National Statistics
Labour market projections,
2006 - 2020

COMPARED TO THE REST OF THE POPULATION, A HIGHER PROPORTION OF OLDER PEOPLE LIVE ALONE AND ARE AT RISK OF ISOLATION

Age UK, 2014

OUR RESEARCH FOUND THAT FOR A THIRD OF INACTIVE PEOPLE (AGED 50 AND OVER), THEIR FACE TO FACE INTERACTIONS WERE LESS THAN ONCE A WEEK.

Active Ageing Prospectus

72% OF THOSE AGED 50-64 ARE IN EMPLOYMENT

Labour Force Survey, 2018

EXPLORING TYPES OF ACTIVITY

Active Lives data shows that as people age, the types of activities they choose or feel able to take part in changes.

This is important because the different activities that people have access to will have an impact on their activity levels and whether they continue to do that activity.

While some activities remain common across all age groups, some become more or less common.

TALKING POINTS

The most common activity for older adults is walking (for leisure and for travel) and, unlike many other activities, walking for leisure increases in popularity.

Cycling too remains a common activity for this age group.

This highlights the importance of having the right environment which supports walking and cycling at any age, and that this remains important as you get older.

It is important to consider what else it is about certain activities that make them more accessible and suitable for older adults.

For example, is it the activity itself, a social aspect to the activity, a familiar or convenient location, the relatable and inspiring workforce who support it?

CHANGING IN POPULARITY AS PEOPLE GET OLDER*

HALF OF ALL ADULTS AGED 55+, **8.2 MILLION PEOPLE**, HAVE TAKEN PART IN **WALKING FOR LEISURE** AT LEAST TWICE IN THE LAST 28 DAYS. A FURTHER **4.5 MILLION** HAVE TAKEN PART IN **WALKING FOR TRAVEL**



RUNNING BECOMES LESS COMMON AS PEOPLE GET OLDER, ALTHOUGH MANY STILL TAKE PART. **882,300 PEOPLE** AGED 55+ TOOK PART IN **RUNNING** TWICE IN THE LAST 28 DAYS



FITNESS ACTIVITIES REMAIN COMMON WITH MANY ADULTS AGED 55+ TAKING PART IN **FITNESS CLASSES (2.2 MILLION)**, **GYM SESSIONS (1.1 MILLION)** AND USING **EXERCISE MACHINES (894,300)** AT LEAST TWICE IN THE LAST 28 DAYS

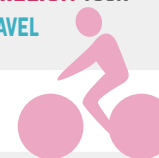


ALTHOUGH SLIGHTLY LESS COMMON, **CLIMBING AND MOUNTAINEERING** (WITH THE MAJORITY MADE UP OF HILL AND MOUNTAIN WALKING) IS STILL AN ACTIVITY COMMON AMONGST THOSE AGED 55+, WITH **695,400** TAKING PART TWICE IN THE LAST 28 DAYS



ADULTS AGED 55+

1.7 MILLION PEOPLE AGED 55+ TOOK PART IN **CYCLING FOR LEISURE** IN THE LAST 28 DAYS. A FURTHER **1 MILLION** TOOK PART IN **CYCLING FOR TRAVEL**



GOLF BECOMES MORE COMMON AS PEOPLE GET OLDER, WITH **668,400 PEOPLE** AGED 55+ TAKING PART AT LEAST TWICE IN THE LAST 28 DAYS



SWIMMING REMAINS A COMMON ACTIVITY AMONGST THOSE AGED 55+, WITH **1.5 MILLION** TAKING PART TWICE IN THE LAST 28 DAYS



BOWLS BECOMES MORE COMMON AS PEOPLE GET OLDER, WITH **321,000 PEOPLE** AGED 55+ HAVING PLAYED AT LEAST TWICE IN THE LAST 28 DAYS



* Relative to rates of participation amongst 35-54 year olds.

PATTERNS WITHIN INACTIVITY

It is important to understand the nature of someone's inactivity as it provides us with a greater understanding of their relationship with sport and physical activity.

Within our Active Lives data, we can break down inactivity by further identifying the frequency and intensity of an individual's activity levels. This reveals that as people get older, they are not only more likely to be inactive, they are also more likely to do no physical activity (0 minutes per week of an intensity).

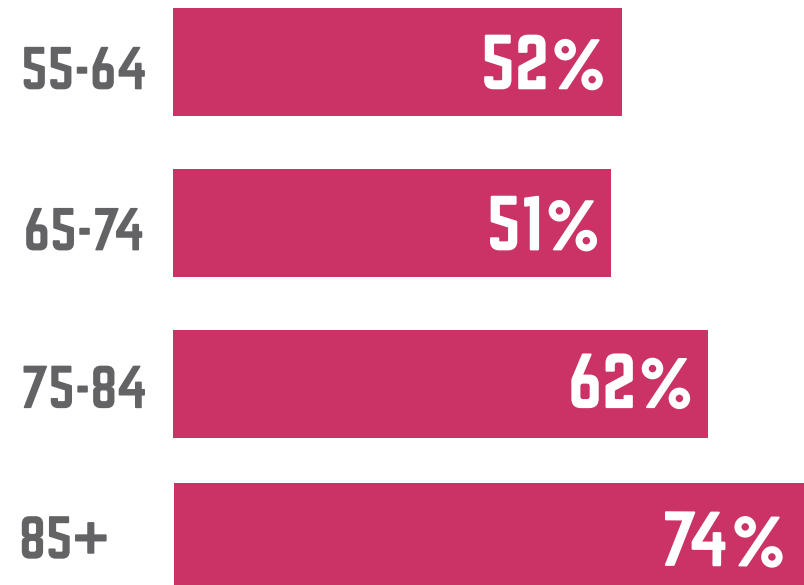
Around half of those aged 55-64 and 65-74 who are inactive, do no physical activity. This trend rises even further for those aged 75-84 and those aged 85+.

In addition, we know that over half (51%) of people aged 55 and over who have done no physical activity in the last 28 days have also done nothing throughout the year. This pattern of consistent inactivity is amplified for those aged 75 and over. For example, 70% of those age 85 and over do no physical activity at all throughout the year.

This demonstrates that many older adults don't have activity as part of their lifestyles at all, and this becomes more common amongst the oldest in our population.

However, this also means that the remaining 49% of those aged 55 and over have done something in the last 12 months, and therefore do have an existing relationship with sport and physical activity. This further illustrates that whilst there are trends regarding age and activity, there is still a lot of variance between individuals.

PROPORTION OF INACTIVE PEOPLE WHO DO NO ACTIVITY (ZERO MINUTES PER WEEK, NO LIGHT ACTIVITY)



PATTERNS WITHIN INACTIVITY (CONTINUED)

FURTHER INSIGHT

We've identified five groups which help explain how individual's attitudes towards sport and physical activity can vary – impacting their motivations and the potential success of programmes designed to increase activity levels:

1. MY ACTIVE DAYS ARE IN THE PAST
2. JUST NOT INTERESTED
3. MY LIFE KEEPS ME ACTIVE ENOUGH
4. ONGOING ATTEMPTS TO BE ACTIVE
5. POSITIVE ABOUT ACTIVITY AND TRYING TO HANG ON

Detail on these groups can be found in our [Active Ageing Prospectus](#), but two of these groups are described below:

GROUP 3: MY LIFE KEEPS ME ACTIVE ENOUGH

Some older people feel they're active enough in the course of their life. They are more likely to be doing something and don't see a need to do anything differently, but are not reaching the 30-minutes physical activity threshold.

"I AM HAPPY WITH HOW ACTIVE I AM"

"I WOULD FIND IT BORING"

GROUP 4: ONGOING ATTEMPTS TO BE ACTIVE

Older people are interested in being more active, but despite being aware of the health benefits they can't get a habit to stick. They lack confidence, are unsure of what to do and worry about their ability and feeling out of place.

"I WOULD LIKE TO BE FITTER THAN I AM"

"I DON'T KNOW WHAT TYPE OF ACTIVITY IS RIGHT FOR ME"

TALKING POINTS

Life changing events or transitions for this audience, such as retiring from full-time work or having grandchildren for the first time, may provide potential opportunities or reasons to build new social circles and become more active.

Nonetheless, taking the first steps to getting more active is difficult and can be intimidating.

It takes courage and effort to get involved and taking part a few times doesn't guarantee that people will stick with it. Lapsing and re-lapsing is common and adapting to your target audience's continued changing circumstances may help them to sustain their involvement.

AGE WITH DISABILITY AND HEALTH CONDITIONS

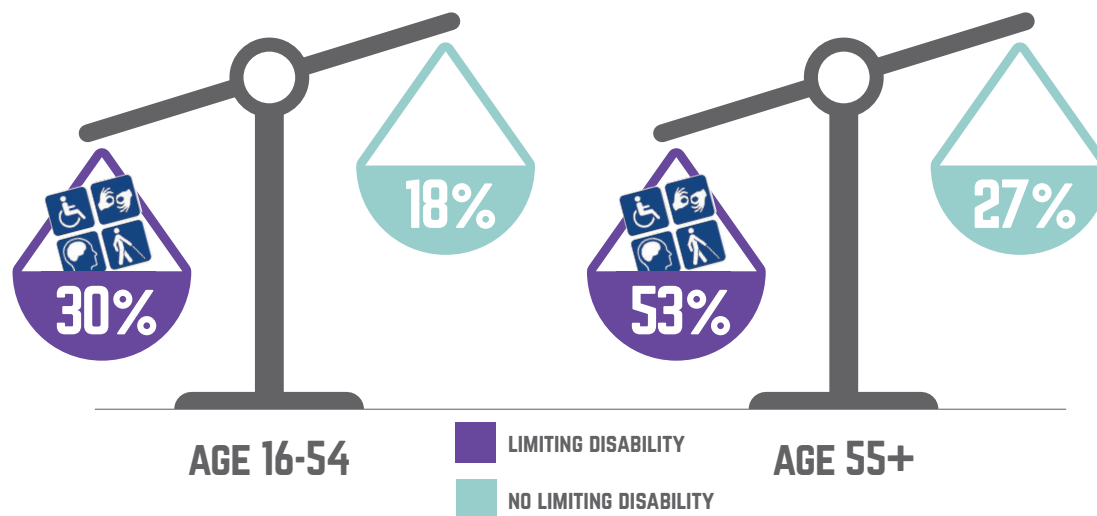
Two in five of those aged 55 and older have a disability so, when looking at activity levels amongst older people, it's important to consider the impact of disability and any associated impairments.

Our Active Lives data shows us that adults with a disability are more likely to be inactive than those without, across all ages. However, for adults aged 55 and over the difference is more pronounced.

Over half of adults aged 55 and over with a disability are inactive (53%), compared to 30% of those aged 16-54 with a disability. This illustrates that age and disability have separate and compounding effects on activity levels. This is further illustrated by the difference also seen for those inactive individuals who do no activity.

Three-quarters (73%) of inactive people aged 55 and over with a disability, have done no activity in the last 28 days, compared to 62% of those aged 16-54 (with a disability) and 45% of those aged 55 and over without a disability.

HOW AGE AND A LIMITING DISABILITY AFFECTS INACTIVITY LEVELS



FURTHER INSIGHT

People are living for longer but we are not necessarily healthier. It is not just how many years you live for that matter but how many healthy years.

Our ageing population has an increasing amount of illness and disabilities such as diabetes, arthritis and back pain. There are also significant inequalities in terms of healthy life expectancy – those living in the least deprived parts of England can expect to live in good health for more than 19 years longer than those in the most deprived areas (Office of National Statistics Healthy Life Expectancy 2012-2014).

TALKING POINTS

Research by the Richmond Group^{*} suggests that exercise and physical activity can be seen as “not for people like me” amongst inactive people with multiple long-term conditions.

The strongest barriers to physical activity can often be internal for these audiences and relate to their symptoms (for example, pain, breathlessness, fear of exacerbating their conditions).

Equally, this research found that these individuals do often want to be more physically active – indicating a valuable opportunity to sensitively change the perception and experience of physical activity for these groups.

^{*} The Richmond Group of Charities is a collaboration of 14 of the leading health and social care organisations in the voluntary sector.

CONCLUSION

While getting older will naturally create new challenges to being active, physical activity can play a fundamental role in ageing healthily. Even moving a little bit more offers a multitude of health and wellbeing benefits for those who are least active.

Whilst we should acknowledge that getting active is hard, and lapsing and re-lapsing is common, there should not be an assumption that older people cannot be active, and we need to work hard to break down these stereotypes.

Older adult's interests, motivations, attitudes and barriers toward physical activity, their budgets, needs and capabilities differ just as they do across any other age group. Growing older also impacts people differently and at different ages.

Moreover, many people we're trying to reach aren't going to think of themselves as 'old', nor identify with the extremes of active older people – such as the achievement of the oldest person running the marathon. It's therefore critical to talk to and truly understand your audience, how to reach and engage them and where feasible, involve them in designing and developing suitable approaches to tackle inactivity.



Sport England
21 Bloomsbury Street
London WC1B 3HF

[sportengland.org](https://www.sportengland.org)

NOTES

TO READ ALL OUR ACTIVE LIVES ADULT REPORTS, VISIT: [SPORTENGLAND.ORG/ACTIVELIVES](https://www.sportengland.org/activelives).

TO CARRY OUT YOUR OWN ANALYSIS OF THE ACTIVE LIVES DATA, VISIT: [ACTIVELIVES.SPORTENGLAND.ORG](https://www.activelives.sportengland.org)

THE DATA INCLUDED IN THIS REPORT CAN BE FOUND IN OUR PUBLISHED DATA TABLES.