

Lifestyle Tips



Issue 02-01/12

Physical activity and ethnicity



The alarming fact is, very few Canadians are physically active enough to meet *Canada's Physical Activity Guidelines*¹. Given the importance of physical

activity in maintaining a healthy body weight and preventing a whole host of chronic diseases, the identification of high-risk groups among Canadians is critical in increasing our physical activity levels as a preventative health measure.

In addition to the psychological stresses of immigrating to a new country, many immigrants face declining health status once they arrive in a newly adopted country. A recent nation-wide study clearly demonstrates that the prevalence of leisure-time physical activity is lower than average in the majority of ethnic minority groups living in Canada and that women in all ethnic groups are less likely to be active².

Furthermore, the studies show that all minority groups (including Aboriginals, Asian, Black, and Latin Americans) were less likely to engage in recreation, sport and endurance activities, yet are more likely to have an active commute compared to Caucasians in Canada³.

With Canada being a highly multicultural country, it's important to identify the groups at risk and develop culturally-appropriate physical activity interventions, especially when targeting specific immigrant and ethnic groups.

Tips

1. Physical activity can be anything that requires someone to move their body and increase their heart rate. Therefore, engaging in activities that are part of the





culture, such as a specific sport or a dance, can be a great way to increase daily physical activity.

2. Engage in physical activities with others that you feel comfortable with. If taking part of a class by yourself makes you feel uncomfortable or language is a barrier, join an activity or a group with a family member or friend who also speaks your first language.
3. Research groups and classes in the community. There are many culturally diverse community centers that offer new classes, sports, and activities that are suitable for various cultures and ethnic groups. Utilize community networks (i.e., word-of-mouth, community groups, newspapers, magazines, and notice boards in centers) to find the classes and activities that suit your lifestyles.
4. Try something new and fun. One of the benefits of living in a new country is exposure to different activities that may not have been offered in your country of origin.

You may discover a new passion for novel physical activities. As long as you are doing something you enjoy, you will stay motivated and on track.

5. Increasing daily physical activity can be as easy as walking or riding your bike to work, parking farther away from the doors, taking the stairs instead of the elevator, or just going for a hike in the park. If the Canadian weather is a deterrent, make sure you dress appropriately – it makes all the difference in being comfortable while outside.
6. Just sit less. Decreasing sedentary activities such as watching television, using the computer, or playing videogames is just as important for your health as being active. Limit sedentary activities to less than two hours a day.
7. Be an advocate in your community. If you cannot find a group or class that is culturally suitable, start your own, or speak up to someone who can start one on your behalf!

Bring physical activity to the members of your community by starting a walking program, a dance or fitness class, or sport group.

References

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- 2 Bryan, S.N., Tremblay, M.S., Perez, C.E., Ardern, C.I., & Katzmarzyk, P.T. (2006). Physical activity and ethnicity: Evidence from the Canadian Community Health Survey. *Can J Pub Hlth*, 97, 4, 271-276.
- 3 Dogra et al. Variation in mode of physical activity by ethnicity and time since immigration: a cross-sectional analysis. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* 2010, 7:75.

