

The benefits of physical activity are numerous, but despite the widespread availability of information that physical activity reduces the risk of premature mortality in general, and of coronary heart disease, hypertension, colon cancer, and diabetes mellitus in particular, nearly three-quarters of American adults are not regularly active. These data reinforce the need to understand how to promote more active lifestyles.

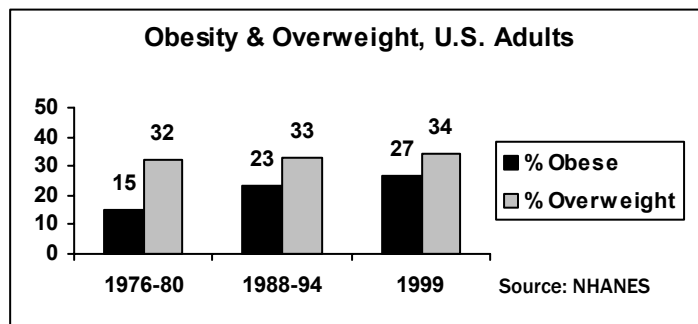
This fact sheet summarizes the role of physical inactivity and disease in the United States, the importance of **Active Living** - a way of life that integrates physical activity daily routines, and how **Active Living by Design** will promote environments that offer choices for integrating physical activity into daily life.

### Chronic Diseases and Conditions Related to Physical Inactivity

Physical inactivity has a significant role in death and disability in the United States, including the most common chronic diseases such as coronary heart disease, stroke, and diabetes;<sup>1</sup> Specifically...

- ▶ Physical inactivity is a primary factor in at least 200,000 deaths annually from coronary heart disease, colon cancer, and diabetes.<sup>ii,iii</sup>
- ▶ 34 percent of coronary heart disease deaths (the leading cause of mortality in the U.S.) can be attributed to physical inactivity.<sup>iv</sup>
- ▶ Physically inactive adults are nearly twice as likely to suffer from coronary heart disease than those who are regularly active.<sup>v</sup>
- ▶ Physical inactivity can increase the risk of stroke and high blood pressure, a major risk factor for cardiovascular diseases<sup>vi</sup>

- ▶ Obesity and overweight<sup>+</sup> play a significant role in death and disability and are strongly influenced by physical inactivity.<sup>vii</sup> One in four adults are considered obese, or approximately 30 pounds overweight.<sup>viii</sup>



- ▶ The proportion of young people who are overweight has more than doubled in the last 20 years.<sup>ix</sup>

<sup>+</sup> Obesity = Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> or greater; overweight = BMI of 25-29.9 kg/m<sup>2</sup>

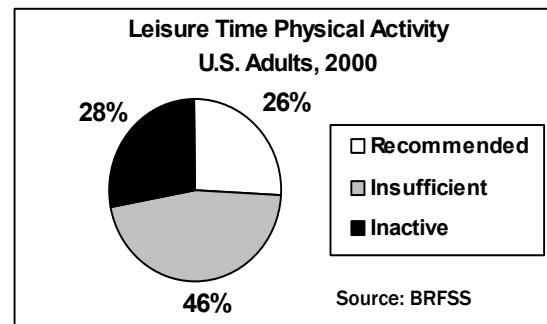
### The Economics of Physical Inactivity and Overweight

The potential savings if all inactive American adults became physically active could be \$76.6 billion in 2000 dollars.<sup>x</sup> The estimated annual cost of obesity and overweight in the United States is approximately \$117 billion.<sup>xi</sup>

### Physical Activity Patterns and Trends in the US

Americans are more likely to be either inactive or participate in physical activities on an irregular basis.

- ▶ In 2000, only 26% of U.S. adults were achieving the recommended levels of physical activity; 28% reported no leisure time activity (sedentary).<sup>xii</sup>
- ▶ Between 1977 and 1995, trips made by walking declined by 40 percent while trips by automobile increased to nearly 90 percent of all trips made.<sup>xiii</sup>
- ▶ More than a third of young people in grades 9–12 do not regularly engage in vigorous physical activity. Daily participation in high school physical education classes dropped from 42% in 1991 to 29% in 1999.<sup>xiv</sup>



### How Much is Enough? Physical Activity Recommendations

The 1996 Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health was a landmark document that collected findings from various scientific studies to describe the benefits of physical activity and issued specific recommendations.<sup>xv</sup>

The conclusion of this report was that in order to reduce the risk of chronic disease, adults should accumulate 30 minutes or more of moderately intense physical activity on five or more days per week. Moderately intense activities include a brisk walk, bicycling, mowing the lawn, taking the stairs, etc.

While 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity can benefit health, the higher the frequency and intensity of activity, the greater the potential health benefit.<sup>xvi</sup> So, for people already meeting the minimum recommendations issued by the Surgeon General, additional physical activity can be even more beneficial.

**Community Solutions**

Active Living by Design will help prepare communities to respond to four calls to action for promoting Active Living.

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**Active Living by Design Calls to Action**

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|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Preparation</b>           | Active Living advocates should develop and foster multi-disciplinary partnerships that include representatives from city planning, transportation, architecture and other fields. It is also important to assess existing policies and environmental conditions in order to plan for improvements and increase public awareness of existing active living opportunities.                                                                               |
| <b>2. Communication</b>         | Active Living advocates should communicate through a number of available outlets such as traditional mass media channels, listservs, and newsletters. Messages should highlight the importance of incorporating routine activities in to daily routines and how they might be obtained in a variety of built, natural, and social environments. Media can be a powerful tool to advocate for policies and environments that support active lifestyles. |
| <b>3. Policies and Programs</b> | Legislators and other policy makers have a key role in community design and transportation options. Influencing decisions that impact policies and programs will ensure that supportive infrastructures are institutionalized.                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>4. Infrastructure</b>        | Promoting routine physical activity will require specific physical improvements such as parks, trails, bikeways, and sidewalks. Implementing and sustaining these facilities will require the full integration of the first three calls to action.                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
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**Resources**

For more information on physical activity and public health and for more resources to improve the health in your community through active living, please see the Active Living by Design website at [www.activelivingbydesign.org](http://www.activelivingbydesign.org). The site contains data sources, funding sources, tools, publications, presentations and links to potential partners. Many national organizations have joined the call for action to promote Active Living. A few of these include:

President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports	<a href="http://www.fitness.gov">www.fitness.gov</a>
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	<a href="http://www.cdc.gov">www.cdc.gov</a>
National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity	<a href="http://www.ncppa.org">www.ncppa.org</a>
American Planning Association	<a href="http://www.planning.org">www.planning.org</a>
Institute of Transportation Engineers	<a href="http://www.ite.org">www.ite.org</a>
Local Government Commission	<a href="http://www.lgc.org">www.lgc.org</a>
International City/County Management	<a href="http://www.icma.org">www.icma.org</a>
National Governors Association	<a href="http://www.nga.org">www.nga.org</a>
League of American Bicyclists	<a href="http://www.bikeleague.org">www.bikeleague.org</a>
America Walks	<a href="http://www.americawalks.org">www.americawalks.org</a>
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy	<a href="http://www.railtrails.org">www.railtrails.org</a>

National Recreation and Park Association

[www.nrpa.org](http://www.nrpa.org)

For more information, please visit our website ([www.activelivingbydesign.org](http://www.activelivingbydesign.org)) or contact us via phone at 919-843-2523.

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## References

- <sup>i</sup> McKenna, et al., Current Issues and Challenges in Chronic Disease Control. In: *Chronic Disease Epidemiology and Control, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Brownson, et al. (Eds.). Washington: American Public Health Association, 1998, pp. 3.
- <sup>ii</sup> Powell K, et al., The public health burdens of sedentary living habits: theoretical but realistic estimates. *Med Sci Sports Exerc.* 1994;26(7); 851-856
- <sup>iii</sup> Hahn, et al., Excess Deaths from Seven Chronic Diseases in the United States, 1986. *JAMA.* 1990;264:2654-2659.
- <sup>iv</sup> Newschaffer, C, et al., Cardiovascular Disease. In: *Chronic Disease Epidemiology and Control, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Brownson, et al. (Eds.). Washington: American Public Health Association, 1998, pp. 297-334.
- <sup>v</sup> Powell K, et al., Physical activity and the incidence of coronary heart disease. *Annual Review of Public Health.* 1987;1987;8:253-287.
- <sup>vi</sup> Ainsworth, B, et al., Physical Inactivity. In: *Chronic Disease Epidemiology and Control, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Brownson, et al. (Eds.). Washington: American Public Health Association, 1998, pp. 195.
- <sup>vii</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services. *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*, 2001. pp. 1,2.
- <sup>viii</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 1999.
- <sup>ix</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/dnpaaag.htm>
- <sup>x</sup> Ibid
- <sup>xi</sup> Ibid
- <sup>xii</sup> Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), 2000. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Nationwide Personal Transportation Survey. US Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Research and Technical Support Center. Lanham, Md: Federal Highway Administration, 1997.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/dnpaaag.htm>.
- <sup>xv</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services. *Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General.* 1996.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Kesaniemi, Y, et al., Dose-response issues concerning physical activity and health: an evidence-based symposium (Consensus Statement). *Medicine and Science in Sports & Exercise.* 2001;33, Suppl.: S351-S358.