

Epidemiology of Physical Activity in American Indians in the Education and Research Towards Health Cohort

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: The health benefits of an active lifestyle are well established. However, Americans in general and American Indians specifically are not sufficiently active to achieve these health benefits.

PURPOSE: This study presents the descriptive epidemiology of physical activity in a community-based sample of American-Indian adults.

METHODS: Data came from Education and Research Towards Health (EARTH), a cross-sectional study conducted between December 2003 and April 2006 of 5207 American-Indian adults in South Dakota and Arizona. Physical activity was assessed using a culturally tailored, computer-assisted instrument. Both type and intensity of activities were measured; minutes per week averaged over the past year was the primary outcome. Individuals were categorized as being sufficiently active, not sufficiently active, or inactive using a cut point of more or less than 150 minutes/week. Information on age, gender, and BMI was also collected.

RESULTS: More than one third of participants were not sufficiently active (<150 minutes/week) and 18% reported no leisure-time activity. Sufficient activity was less often reported by women than men (41% vs 56%) and by participants from the Southwest than those from the Northern Plains (44% vs 50%). Of all activity categories, the most time was spent on household activities among all participants. There were clear trends in physical (in)activity across BMI strata; time spent in sedentary activities increased while leisure-time activity decreased with BMI.

CONCLUSIONS: American-Indian adults in this cohort exhibited levels of physical (in)activity similar to those of other racial/ethnic groups in the U.S., suggesting a need for specific interventions to increase activity levels across the population.