



**Australian Social Trends  
2007**

**Article: Participation in  
sports and physical  
recreation**



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## Australian Social Trends 2007

# Article: Participation in sports and physical recreation

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## SYMBOLS AND USAGES

billion	1,000 million
kg	kilogram
m	metre
n.a.	not available
n.e.c	not elsewhere classified
n.p.	not published
n.y.a.	not yet available
no.	number
'000	thousand
'000m	thousand million
\$	dollar
\$m	million dollars
\$b	billion dollars
\$US	American dollar
%	per cent
*	estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution
**	estimate has a relative standard error of greater than 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use
. .	not applicable
—	nil or rounded to zero (including null cells)

Where figures have been rounded, discrepancies may occur between the sums of the component items and totals.

# Participation in sports and physical recreation

**In 2005-06, two-thirds (66%) of Australians aged 15 years and over took part in some sport or physical recreation with 27% of men and 32% of women participating more than twice each week.**

Participating regularly in physical activity has been shown to benefit an individual's health and wellbeing. Regular physical activity is important in reducing the risk of chronic diseases, such as heart disease and stroke, obesity, diabetes and some forms of cancer.<sup>1</sup> The National Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity, preferably every day of the week, to obtain health benefits.<sup>2</sup> The national guidelines do not prescribe what kinds of physical activities may be most beneficial for improving health. Health related campaigns tend to focus on promoting activities such as walking, as this is likely to be of benefit across all age groups, and has minimal risk of injury. People participate in a wide range of sports and physical recreation, all of which may be important for general fitness. Participation in sports and physical recreation also provides important leisure and social activities for many people.

This article investigates the types of sports and physical recreation engaged in and the characteristics of participants. In particular, those who regularly participated more than twice a week are examined.

## Participation rates

In 2005-06, 10.5 million Australians aged 15 years and over (66%) took part in sports and physical recreation. These included 29% of the population (or 4.7 million) who regularly participated more than twice a week and 36% (or 5.8 million) who participated up to twice

## Data sources and definitions

Data presented in this article are primarily from the 2005-06 ABS Multi-Purpose Household Survey (MPHS) which, among other topics, collected information from those aged 15 years and over on participation in sports and physical recreation activity.

*Sports and physical recreation activities* were defined as including all types of activity other than gardening, housework, manual labouring and other forms of occupational physical activity.

*Participation* was defined as playing a sport or physically undertaking an activity at least once during the year before interview.

The *participation rate* for any group was calculated by expressing the number of people who participated in an activity at least once during the year as a percentage of the population aged 15 years and over.

Measures of the weekly frequency and regularity of participation throughout the year were also obtained from the MPHS and include:

*More than twice a week* refers to participation 105 times or more per year and in each month of the year.

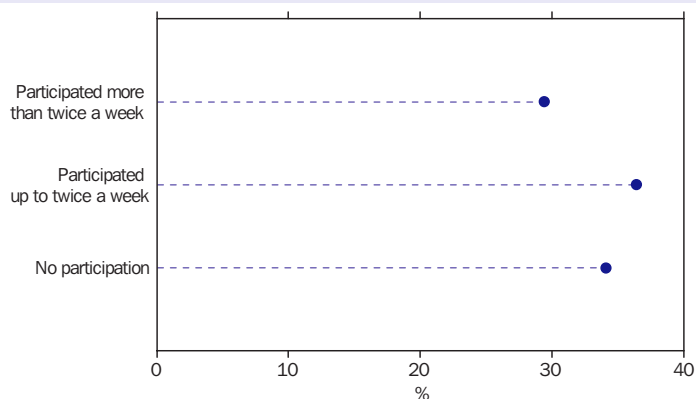
For this article, those who participated less frequently and regularly, are grouped as:

Participating *up to twice a week*, that is up to 104 times per year and in one to twelve months of the year.

Source: *Participation in Sports and Physical Recreation, Australia, 2005-06* (ABS cat. no. 4177.0).

a week. The remainder, approximately 5.5 million people (34%), reported that they did not participate in any such activity in the 12 months before interview.

## Regularity of participation in sports and physical recreation — 2005-06



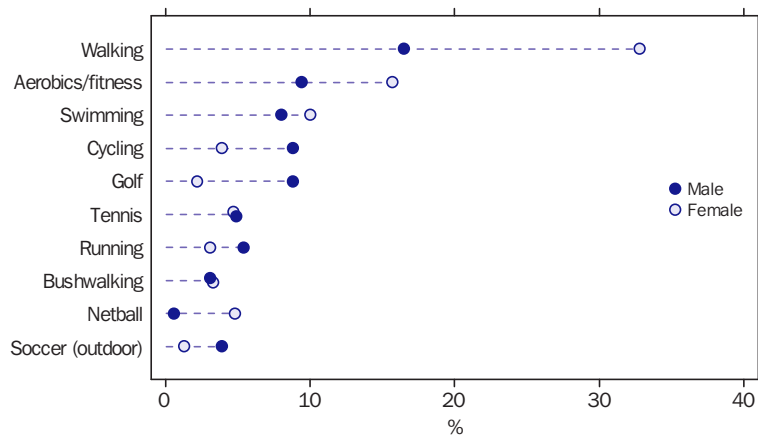
Source: ABS 2005-06 Multi-Purpose Household Survey.

## Most popular activities

While there are a great variety of sports and physical recreational activities that people participate in, the ten most popular activities accounted for 76% of participation in 2005-06.

Walking was the most commonly reported physical recreation activity among Australians. One quarter of the population aged 15 years and over (almost 4 million people) participated in the 12 months prior to interview, with the female rate (33%) being almost double the male rate (17%). Walkers also accounted for over half of those who participated in sports and physical recreation more than twice a week (15% of the population).

## Participation level of most popular activities — 2005–06



Source: ABS 2005–06 Multi-Purpose Household Survey.

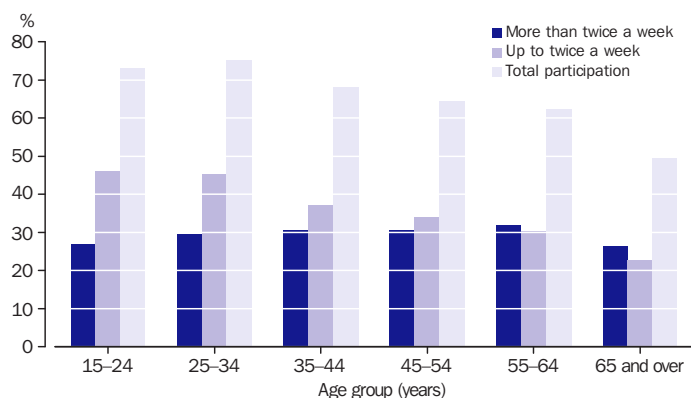
Aerobics/fitness was the second most popular activity, with 13% of the population aged 15 years and over participating. This activity was more popular with women (16%) than men (9%).

Swimming, the third most popular activity, had a participation rate of 9% with more women (10%) than men (8%) involved.

Over 1.0 million people (6% of the population) participated in cycling, and a further 875,000 (6%) played golf. Unlike the top three activities, these tended to be male dominated, with cycling being reported by 9% of males and 4% of females, while golf was played by 9% of males compared with 2% of females.

Males also had higher rates of participation in running, soccer, and cricket, while women were more active in netball, yoga and dancing.

## Regularity of participation by age — 2005–06



Source: ABS 2005–06 Multi-Purpose Household Survey.

## Characteristics of participants

Earlier analysis on the characteristics of participants in sports and physical recreation from the ABS 2002 General Social Survey found considerable variation in rates among different groups of the population.<sup>3</sup>

Controlling for other variables, the key associations with high levels of participation were demonstrated to be socio-demographic factors such as having a relatively high household income, living in an area with low socioeconomic disadvantage and having a post school qualification such as a degree or diploma. Other factors associated with participation were living alone or in a couple family without children, as well as being young (aged 18–24 years) and male.<sup>3</sup>

### ...age and sex

In the most recent 2005–06 survey, the participation rates for sports and physical recreation were higher for the younger age groups. Of those aged 15–24 years and 25–34 years, 73% and 75% (respectively) participated in the 12 months prior to interview. Participation rates declined with increasing age, with the lowest level (49%) being reported for those aged 65 years and over.

The age pattern for total participation was driven mainly by the age-specific rates of those who participated up to twice a week. For the latter group, the rate of participation was highest in the 15–24 and 25–34 years groups (at 46%) and lowest for those aged 65 years and over (23%).

However, the age-specific pattern of people who participated more than twice-weekly showed relatively consistent proportions engaging at this frequent and regular level, with a range of 27% (for those aged 65 years and over) to 32% (for those aged 55–64 years). Almost one-third (32%) of females participated more than twice a week compared with 27% of males. The peak age group for females participating at this level was the 55–64 year age group (37%), while the for males, the peak was in the 15–24 years age group (29%).

### ...country of birth

People born overseas in main English speaking countries had the highest rate of participation, with 72% reporting participation in 2005–06. This compared with 68% for those born in Australia and 52% for other overseas born people. A similar pattern in participation rate occurred for those participating more than twice-weekly, with the highest rate (38%) for those born

### Participation rate, selected characteristics — 2005–06

	Participation	
	Total participation %	more than twice a week %
Country of birth		
Australia	68.3	30.1
Other main English-speaking countries	72.4	37.8
Other countries	51.6	21.1
Labour force status		
Employed	72.0	31.0
Not in labour force	54.5	26.5
Education level		
Tertiary	80.8	39.4
Year 12 or below	58.7	25.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>65.9</b>	<b>29.4</b>
	'000	'000
<b>Total</b>	<b>10 542.1</b>	<b>4 747.3</b>

Source: ABS 2005–06 Multi-Purpose Household Survey.

overseas in main English speaking countries, compared with 30% for those born in Australia and 21% for those born in other overseas countries.

### ...labour force status

Employed people had a much higher overall participation rate (72%) than those who were not in the labour force (55%). However, this difference in rates was less for those who participated more than twice a week. For this

group, employed people had a participation rate of 31%, while those not in the labour force participated at a rate of 27%.

### ...education level

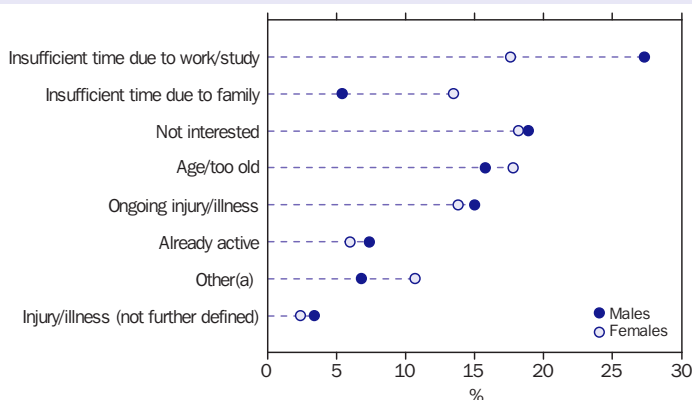
One of the strongest associations with participation rates was with education level attained. In 2005–06, those with tertiary qualifications had a participation rate of 81%, compared with 59% for those whose highest level of attainment was Year 12 or below. Similarly, for those who participated more than twice-weekly, those with tertiary qualifications had a higher participation rate (39%) than those with qualifications to Year 12 or below (25%).

### Constraints and motivators

For those who did not take part, or who reported participating 12 times or less, in any sports or physical recreation in the 12 months before interview, the main constraint cited by 22% (or 1.4 million) was insufficient time because of work or study commitments. This was the most common main reason for males (27%), while for females, lack of interest was cited as the most common main reason (18%).

For those who participated more than 12 times within the 12 month period before interview, the majority of people (54% or 5.2 million) reported health and fitness as the most common main motivator. This was the main reason listed by 59% of females (2.9 million) and 50% of males (2.3 million) who participated more than 12 times in a year.

### Main constraint for non or occasional participants — 2005–06



(a) Includes temporary injury/illness, cost and insufficient time for reasons other than work, study or family.

Source: ABS 2005–06 Multi-Purpose Household Survey.

### Endnotes

- 1 World Health Organisation 2006, Chronic Disease Information Sheets: Physical Activity, WHO, viewed 1 May 2007, <<http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/publications/facts/pa/en/index.html>>.
- 2 Department of Health and Ageing 1999, *An active way to better health. National Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults*, DoHA, viewed 1 May 2007, <<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/content/phd-physical-activity-adults-pdf-cnt.htm>>.
- 3 Stratton, M, Conn, L, Liaw, C and Conolly, L 2005, *Sport and Related Recreational Physical Activity - The Social Correlates of Participation and Non-Participation*, paper presented at the Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand (SMAANZ) Conference, Canberra.

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