



Changing the Canadian Landscape...one step at a time

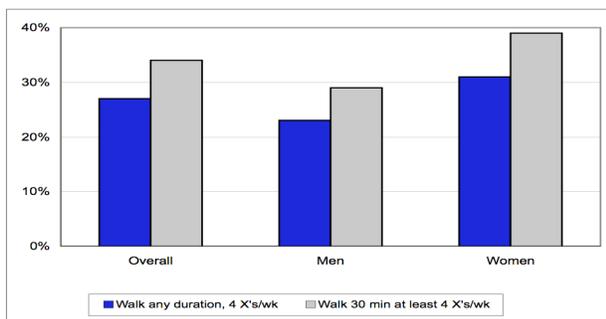
Results of the Physical Activity Monitor 2007

Social Norms and Walking

Walking offers a low cost, easy way to accumulate sufficient levels of physical activity. The Canadian Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living¹ recommends that adults go for a brisk walk at least four times a week for at least 30 minutes on each occasion. The more Canadians see others walking to commute or for recreation, the more it will be seen as attractive or as part of our national culture.

The 2007 Physical Activity Monitor examined the extent to which Canadians walked regularly for leisure and active transportation (at least four times weekly in the previous year), and whether they accumulated at least two hours of walking per week (on average over the previous 12 months). Although the question asked does not permit an exact assessment of the guideline criteria, it permits reasonable approximations using these two criteria. Few Canadians achieve the physical activity guidelines, based on walking alone. Overall, 27% of Canadians walk the equivalent of at least four occasions per week and 34% accumulate the equivalent of at least two hours per week.

FIGURE 1: SUFFICIENT WALKING, OVERALL AND BY GENDER

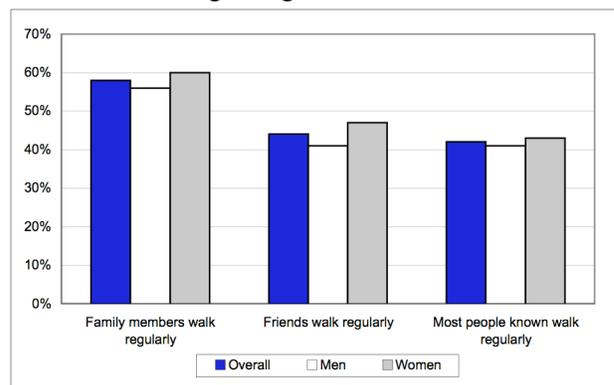


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The Monitor also examined whether members of respondents' social circles include those who walk regularly, here defined for at least 30 minutes a day on most days of the week. According to Canadians:

- * 58% agree or strongly agree that their *family members* walk regularly, while 31% disagree or strongly disagree and 11% are not sure,
- * 44% agree to some extent that their *friends* walk regularly, while 29% disagree or strongly disagree and 27% are unsure, and
- * 42% agree or strongly agree that *most people they know* walk regularly, while 33% disagree or strongly disagree and 25% are unsure.

FIGURE 2: SOCIAL NORMS, OVERALL AND BY GENDER % agreeing to some extent

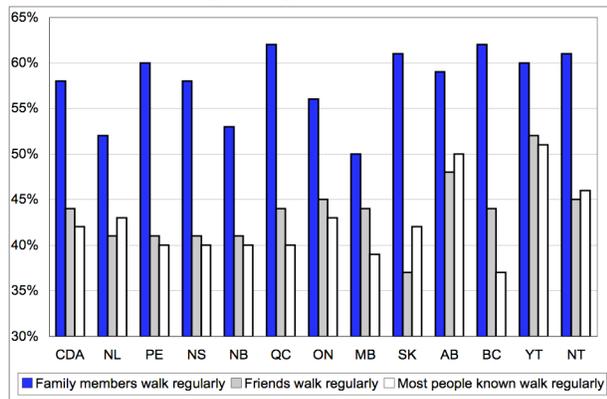


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Region There are no significant regional differences in the proportion saying that *family members* walk regularly; however, residents of Nova Scotia are more likely than the average Canadian to disagree that *friends* walk regularly and residents of the Yukon are more likely to agree that *most people they know* walk regularly.



FIGURE 3: SOCIAL NORMS BY PROVINCE
% agreeing to some extent

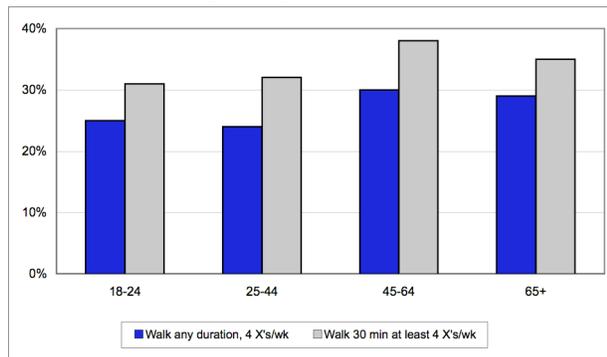


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Age and sex Women are more likely than men to report walking sufficient amounts to meet the two criteria. This is particularly true with respect to walking at least two hours a week within the 18 to 24 year age group.

Canadians aged 25 to 64 are more likely than those 65 years or older to disagree or strongly disagree that *family members* walk regularly, though this relationship is only significant among women.

FIGURE 4: SUFFICIENT WALKING BY AGE
% agreeing to some extent

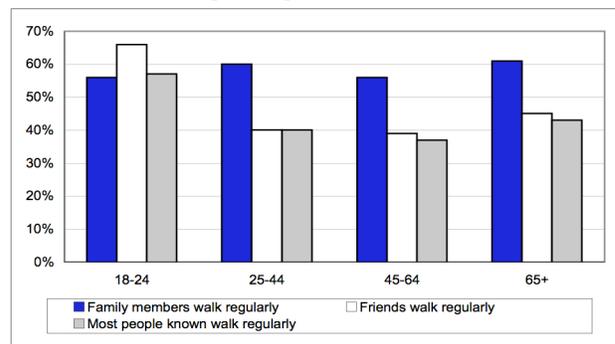


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Women are more likely than men to agree that their *friends* walk regularly. In addition, Canadians aged 18 to 24 are more likely than those 25 years or older to agree that their *friends* do this, and this age-related finding holds true for both men and women. Women aged 45 to 64 are more likely than men in the same age group to agree that their *friends* walk regularly.

There is no difference between men and women in the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement that *most people they know* walk regularly. Adults aged 18 to 24 are more likely than those 25 years or older to agree with this. When examined by age and sex combined, both men and women aged 18 to 24 are more likely than their 45 to 64 year old counterparts to agree with this. In addition, among women, those aged 65 or older are less likely than those aged 45 to 64 to disagree that most people they know walk regularly.

FIGURE 5: SOCIAL NORMS BY AGE
% agreeing to some extent

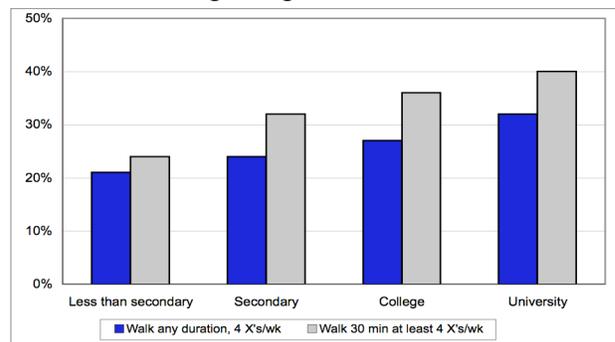


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Socio-economic and demographic characteristics

The proportion meeting the two walking criteria generally increases with increasing levels of education. For example, Canadians who have attended university are more likely than those with less than a secondary level of education to meet both walking criteria. Retired Canadians are more likely than those who are employed full time to report that they accumulate at least two hours of weekly walking.

FIGURE 6: WALKING BEHAVIOUR BY EDUCATION
% agreeing to some extent



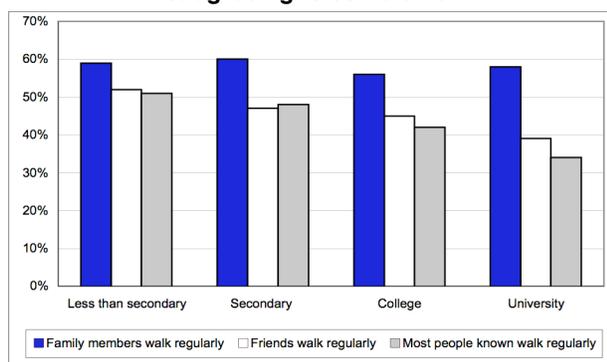
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Higher income Canadians are generally more likely than those with lower household incomes to disagree that their *family members* walk regularly. Homemakers are more likely than full time workers to agree that their *family members* walk regularly, and retirees are less likely than full time workers to disagree. Canadians who are married are more likely than those who are widowed, divorced, or separated to disagree with this.

The proportion of adults saying that *friends* walk regularly decrease with increasing level of education. Both students and those who are employed part time are more likely than those who work full time to agree that *friends* walk regularly. Students are also more likely than unemployed Canadians to agree with this. Canadians who have never been married are most likely to say that their *friends* walk regularly.

The proportion of adults who say that *most people they know* walk regularly decreases with increasing level of education and household income. For example, those who have completed university are least likely to agree, and those with the highest household incomes are less likely than those with the lowest incomes to agree, that *most people they know* walk to this extent. Canadians who are employed full time are more likely than students and part time employees to disagree that *most people they know* do this. Canadians who have never been married are more likely than married Canadians to agree that *most people they know* spend this much time in daily walking.

FIGURE 7: SOCIAL NORMS BY EDUCATION LEVEL
% agreeing to some extent

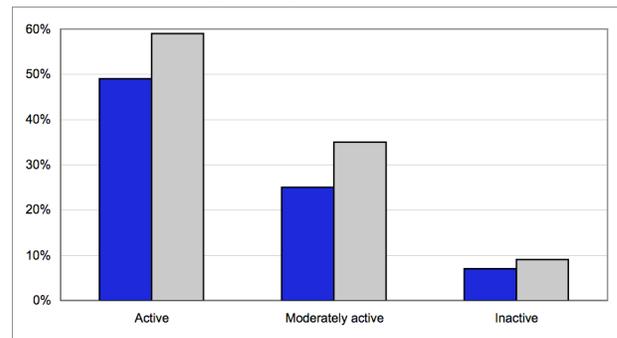


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There are no differences among residents of communities of different sizes with respect to their walking behaviour or their perceptions of walking regularity among their families, friends, and wider groups of people known.

Activity Level Unsurprisingly, reporting sufficient walking per week increases by physical activity level.

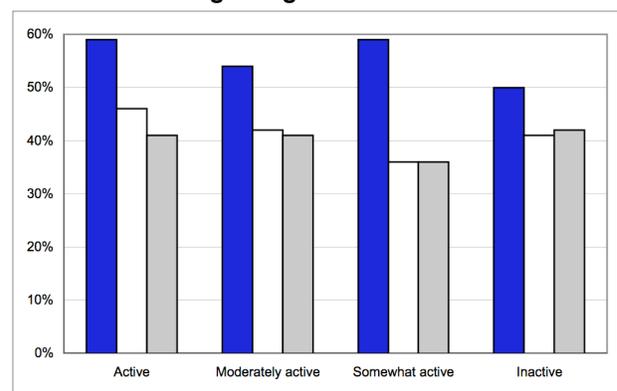
FIGURE 8: WALKING BEHAVIOUR BY ACTIVITY LEVEL
% agreeing to some extent



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Further, active Canadians are more likely than only somewhat active Canadians to report that their *friends* walk regularly. There are, however, no differences between active and less active Canadians in the extent to which they agree that their *family members* or that *most people they know* walk regularly.

FIGURE 9: SOCIAL NORMS BY ACTIVITY LEVEL
% agreeing to some extent



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Summary Walking is Canada's most popular physical activity.² Walking regularly is more prevalent among women, those with higher

levels of education, retirees, and those who are active. Despite this, the relatively low descriptive norms for walking among friends, family, and most people known by respondents indicates that walking is not necessarily viewed as a normative behaviour by Canadians.

Several interesting findings can be observed with respect to social norms. First, although one's level of physical activity overall does not seem to be related to whether an individual agrees that their *family* or *most people they know* walk regularly, active Canadians do appear to have more active *friends*. Many Canadians report that their friends and most people they know do not walk to this extent. The higher likelihood of those who have not completed high school, who are students, who work part time and who have never been married to agree that friends and most people they know walk this much may be a reflection of age and life stage.

Recommendations for Action Research suggests that the effects of the physical environment on the physical activity of an individual can be influenced by the social environment³: Social norms and their effects on one's perceptions of the ability to be active (self-efficacy) figure prominently in many behavioural theories, including Social-cognitive Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Indeed, the combined impact of strategies that influence behaviour on the individual, socio-environmental, and physical environmental levels has been shown to be more effective than single focus efforts.^{4,5} Intervention efforts which include mass media campaigns, policy, and environmental supports can successfully influence walking behaviour.^{6,7,8} Within this broader context, health promoters may want to consider the following in their attempts to create a supportive social norm to promote walking:

- * **Encourage Canadians to integrate walking into their daily routines** Messages about easy ways to fit walking into daily routines can include walking to work or

getting off the bus to work a few stops early, parking the car further away, running short errands or commuting to meetings on foot, taking the stairs instead of the elevator, holding walking meetings, and taking a walk on a lunch break.⁹ Other policies can include bus pass subsidies,¹⁰ elimination of free or subsidized workplace parking, and implementation of guaranteed ride home programs.^{11,12,13} Some municipalities are encouraging walking in facilities not traditionally used for walking (e.g., indoor soccer domes), which can be negotiated into funding agreements for facility usage. Uptake of these initiatives can influence the social environment to make walking rather than sedentary behaviours, the normative activity.

- * **Encourage walking as an attainable activity to sedentary Canadians**

Endeavouring to become more active may seem daunting to many sedentary Canadians. Though inactive Canadians are no less likely to hold strong beliefs about the health and personal benefits of physical activity³ and are, for the most part, similarly likely to report that members of their social networks walk regularly, they are significantly more likely to hold negative attitudes about physical activity.¹⁴ The social norm to walk may not be strong enough among sedentary Canadians to overcome the influence of their attitudes, which may reduce perceptions of control over activity choice and intention to be active.¹⁵

Walking can be promoted through social marketing techniques as a low-impact, pleasant, and easy way to increase activity levels among less active Canadians. *Wheeling Walks*, a social marketing campaign in West Virginia that sought to increase walking through fostering social networks and influencing social supports for regular walking, achieved significant short-term success rates among insufficiently active residents (compared to a control

community who received no campaign), as measured by the campaign awareness, walking adoption, and community-wide activity rates.¹⁶ To achieve long-term change, *Wheeling Walks* (<http://www.wheelingwalks.org>) also includes a phase of policy and environment change through liaising with officials and stakeholders in campaign communities; long-term planning is critical to achieve true success in effecting a shift away from sedentary behaviours among Canadians.

- ✦ **Institute comprehensive workplace interventions to encourage workers to walk more** Time commitments present significant perceived barriers to physical activity among many workers.¹⁷ Working Canadians less frequently report regular walking among their family and peers and are less likely to accumulate walking time to meet guidelines. Promotion efforts should therefore encourage Canadians to pursue walking not only during leisure time but also as a physical activity that can be integrated into the many domains of their lives, for stress relief, or for social benefits (see www.walkaboutns.ca). Policies that encourage workplaces to provide accessible stairways and showers, as well as providing active living or walking maps for workplaces may assist employees to incorporate walking as an integral part of their workdays.¹⁸

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