



## Resources ♦ Ressources

### Shown to be useful

#### *Survey shows positive results for first-ever set of national physical activity guidelines*

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Canada's first-ever set of national physical activity guidelines successfully encouraged positive changes in physical activity knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour in the short term, according to a survey conducted in spring 1999. *Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living* was developed as a stand-alone self-help tool, to assist inactive people to begin to improve their health through regular physical activity.

Releasing the *Guide* in October 1998 was the first important public step taken by Health

Canada and its partners, including the College of Family Physicians of Canada, toward reaching Canada's goal to decrease the number of inactive Canadians by 10% in the year 2003. The goal was set in August 1997 by the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers responsible for Fitness, Recreation and Sport, in response to strong evidence that physical inactivity is a serious health issue for more than two thirds of Canadians.

Since its launch, more than five million copies of the *Guide* have been distributed through the toll-free service, which provides an accessible, cost-free means of ordering the *Guide* and related materials to help Canadians achieve health benefits by being more active. The objective of the telephone survey was to analyze three aspects of the public's reaction to *Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living*: effectiveness of distribution through the toll-free number; ease of comprehension; and short-term effect on physical



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activity knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour.

#### **Methods and sample statistics**

Phone interviews were conducted with 496 respondents from a randomly selected base sample of 1471 people who ordered the *Guide* through the toll-free number. A professional polling firm interviewed respondents between March 26 and April 4, 1999. The margin of error was 4.4% 19 times out of 20.

• The sample was geographically rep-

resentative of the Canadian population.

- Subjects' ages ranged from 20 to 80 or older, with 66.2% of respondents between 40 and 69.
- Most (72.4%) respondents were women.
- About 66% of respondents said English was their first language; 23% cited French; 11% cited another language.
- More than half (53%) of those ordering the *Guide* were inactive or irregularly active.

#### **Findings**

Distribution and delivery of the *Guide* via the toll-free service seems both effective and expedient. Nine of 10 respondents found the service either "very helpful" or "somewhat helpful." Respondents said they heard about the *Guide* from magazines (21%), television (20.2%), newspapers (14.5%), their doctors (7.9%), and the Internet (6.5%).

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Six of 10 people who ordered the *Guide* had read it, and almost all respondents who had read it (98.6%) said they found it easy to understand. In addition, three quarters of respondents said they learned something of value from the *Guide* over and above what they already knew on the subject of physical activity and how it relates to health and well-being.

When asked to identify (unprompted) the most important messages from the *Guide*, the most frequent response was “One needs to be active to stay healthy” (42.2%), followed by “Activity suggestions” (18.5%), “Importance of regular physical activity” (14.9%), and “All physical activity, even moderate, is good” (14.2%).

Some experts suggest that health education materials like *Canada’s Physical Activity Guide* are better at creating awareness of a problem than at changing behaviour. However, almost 70% of survey respondents said they had increased their activity level since ordering the *Guide*. The *Guide* appears to have had some positive effect on respondents’ physical activity in the short term.

Nine of 10 respondents said they have kept the *Guide* as an information resource, while close to half of all respondents had already recommended the *Guide* to others.

*Canada’s Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living* was developed to address a need in the Canadian population. Two thirds of Canadians are at increased risk for heart disease, obesity, high blood pressure, adult-onset diabetes, osteoporosis, hypertension, and other serious illnesses because of their sedentary lifestyles. The *Guide* has been officially endorsed by the College of Family Physicians of Canada and serves as the foundation for development and implementation of the College’s Physical Activity and Health Strategy, “Getting active about physical inactivity!”

The *Guide*, its companion *Handbook*, and a version specifically developed for older adults are available free of charge through the *Guide* website at [www.paguide.com](http://www.paguide.com) and by calling toll-free 1-888-334-9769. ♦

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