

Only 42% of LGBT people meet the level of physical activity required for good health, compared to 59% of people in the general population.¹

The National Picture

The Chief Medical Officer recommends that adults undertake at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise, or 75 minutes of vigorous exercise, each week, as well as muscle strengthening exercise on at least two days per week. Yet across England activity levels have been declining since the 1960s.

Nationwide figures show that 33% of men and 45% of women are not active enough for good health². Physical inactivity is now responsible for 1 in 6 deaths in the UK and up to 40% of many long-term conditions³. Tackling physical inactivity is now a major public health aim. Many positive outcomes from the CCG Outcomes Indicators and Public Health Outcomes Indicators can be linked directly to increasing physical activity.

Physical Activity and LGBT People

Despite a focus on promoting physical activity (including the publication of PHE's major call-to-action Everybody Active, Every Day in 2014), little research has been carried out on the physical activity - of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans⁴ (LGBT) people. The Active People Survey 2012 monitored sexual orientation and found that lesbian and bisexual women and gay men were more likely than their heterosexual peers to participate in sport at least once a week⁵. But this survey did not measure physical activity outside of sport, or whether participants were active enough to maintain good health. It also did not monitor trans status, nor give options other than male or female for people to define their gender.

55% of LGBT men were not active enough to maintain good health, compared to 33% of men in the general population.⁶

The Health Survey for England 2012 measured physical activity across England, but did not monitor sexual orientation or trans status, and also gave no options other than male or female for people to define their gender. This survey found that 33% of men and 45% of women do not reach the government guidelines for physical activity.⁷

56% of LGBT women were not active enough to maintain good health, compared to 45% of women in the general population.⁸

With this in mind, the National LGB&T Partnership, with support from Public Health England, carried out a survey of nearly 1,000 LGBT people living in England. Survey of Exercise & Physical Activity in LGB&T Lives in England explored the physical activity habits of LGBT people from across the country, asking both about sport participation and about other physical activity.

64% of LGBT people who identified as something other than male or female (eg genderfluid or genderqueer) were not active enough to maintain good health.⁹



Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Trans People and Physical Activity: What You Need To Know

This survey monitored both sexual orientation and trans status as well as other demographic information and had responses from across England. It revealed that over half (52%) of LGBT people do not meet the government recommendations for physical activity.

Unlike in the Health Survey for England data, there was little difference in rates of physical activity between male and female respondents, with 56% of LGBT women and 55% of LGBT men not reaching government recommendations, compared to 45% of women and 33% of men in the general population. People who do not identify as either male or female were more likely to not do enough physical activity, with 64% of this group not meeting the recommendations. Trans people overall were also less likely to be meeting physical activity guidelines, with 60% not reaching the recommended levels. There were marginal differences between activity levels of different sexual orientations, with lesbian/gay women and bisexual men being slightly less likely to meet the recommended levels of physical activity than bisexual women and gay men.



LGBT people and inactivity

According to national figures, 19% of men and 26% of women in the general population are inactive, meaning that they do less than thirty minutes of physical activity per week.¹⁰ Although the LGBT respondents to our survey were less likely than the general population to meet physical activity guidelines, they were also less likely to be completely inactive. Only 8% of respondents said they did less than 30 minutes of physical activity a week (this figure did not differ depending on gender).

These figures may have been skewed by the fact that survey respondents were recruited through a snowball technique, with the survey being disseminated by several LGBT sports clubs. However, they do suggest that there is an opportunity to encourage an increase in levels and/or intensity of exercise to build on existing physical activity with some LGBT people.

Overcoming barriers to LGBT people undertaking physical activity

A report from the Brunel Centre for Sport, Health and Wellbeing into physical activity among LGBT communities in England highlighted that we do not know what works best to engage LGBT communities in sustainable physical activities for health, and that provision still remains problematic in terms of inclusiveness, discrimination and access to appropriate environments to encourage participation.¹¹

76% of LGBT people who were sports club members met recommendations for physical activity, compared to 38% of LGBT people who were not club members.¹²

Around 17% of the survey respondents were members of a sports club or team, with 48% of these being members of LGBT-specific clubs. 76% of LGBT people who were members of sports clubs met the national recommendations for physical activity, compared to 38% of LGBT people who were not members of sports clubs. This suggests that supporting sports clubs and teams to become more welcoming to LGBT people and encouraging the development of LGBT sports/exercise groups may help increase physical activity amongst some LGBT people.

Responses from NGBs (National Governing Bodies, the officially recognised organisations responsible for the development of sport in England) to an information request showed that the majority of NGBs (53%) had no insight into LGBT participation in their sport and only 28% have both gathered insight and are currently working to increase sport participation by LGBT people. However, the report does highlight good practice from small, medium and large NGBs which could be used as a template for other sports.¹³

Recommendations

- Stakeholders working to encourage physical activity (including Public Health England, local authorities and funding bodies) should build on existing resources to increase levels and/or intensity of exercise to among LGBT people.
- When encouraging an increase in physical activity to their patients or service users, healthcare providers should consider the potential barriers to involvement for LGBT people, such as fear of discrimination when accessing mainstream sports groups, and work with these individuals and the local community to address these barriers.
- National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and Sport England should work with sports clubs and teams to tackle discrimination and ensure that they are overtly welcoming and proactively engaging LGBT people. Where feasible, NGBs and funders should support the development of LGBT specific sports/exercise groups.
- National Governing Bodies, sports groups and local authorities should monitor the sexual orientation and trans status of people using sports groups and facilities in order to understand the needs and experiences of LGBT people. Future research into physical activity should also monitor these characteristics and analyse the data accordingly.

Endnotes

1. Everybody active, every day: a framework to embed physical activity into daily life, Public Health England, 2014. The figures for the general population are 55% for women and 67% for men. LGB&T levels of physical activity are thus 13% to 25% below the general population.
2. Health Survey for England 2012: Health, social care and lifestyles, The Information Centre: Leeds, 2013
3. Everybody active, every day: a framework to embed physical activity into daily life, Public Health England, 2014
4. Trans is an umbrella and inclusive term used to describe people whose gender identity differs in some way from that which they were assigned at birth; including non-binary people, cross dressers and those who partially or incompletely identify with their sex assigned at birth.
5. Active People Survey 2012, Sport England
6. Figures from Survey of Exercise & Physical Activity in LGB&T Lives in England, 2015, National LGB&T Partnership and Physical Activity Statistics 2015, British Heart Foundation
7. Physical Activity Statistics 2015, British Heart Foundation
8. Figures from Survey of Exercise & Physical Activity in LGB&T Lives in England, 2015, National LGB&T Partnership and Physical Activity Statistics 2015, British Heart Foundation
9. Survey of Exercise & Physical Activity in LGB&T Lives in England, 2015, National LGB&T Partnership
10. Physical Activity Statistics 2015, British Heart Foundation
11. Mansfield, Kay, Meads & Caudwell, Rapid Topic Overview: Physical Activity Among LGB&T Communities in England, Brunel Centre for Sport, Health & Wellbeing, 2014
12. Figures from Survey of Exercise & Physical Activity in LGB&T Lives in England, 2015, National LGB&T Partnership and Physical Activity Statistics 2015, British Heart Foundation
13. <https://nationallgbtpartnershipdotorg.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/np-survey-of-exercise-physical-activity-report-v2.pdf>