

2016 Survey on Physical Activity

AARP Research
July 2016



Research

About AARP

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The views expressed herein are for information, debate, and discussion, and do not necessarily represent official policies of AARP.

Acknowledgments

GfK conducted this survey for AARP using its nationally representative online panel, Knowledge Panel. This report was prepared by Chuck Rainville, Laura Mehegan & Laura Skufca in AARP Research. For additional information about the survey, contact Chuck Rainville at grainville@aarp.org. Media inquiries should be directed to Greg Phillips at gphillips@aarp.org.

Objectives

- To gauge the extent to which 40+ are engaging in physical exercise and which types of exercise they are engaging in.
- To understand the barriers to physical exercise.
- To examine the relationship between physical exercise and brain health.

Methodology

- An online survey fielded April 29-May 15, 2016 among a nationally representative sample of 1,530 Americans age 40+.
- Additional interviews were conducted to achieve the following samples:
 - 510 Hispanic/Latinos age 40+ (conducted in both English and Spanish)
 - 503 African Americans age 40+
 - 362 Asian Americans age 40+.
- The data was weighted by age, gender, race, ethnicity, employment status and income.
- All estimates are for the general 40+ US population unless otherwise noted.
- The margin of error for the national sample of 1,530 adults age 40+ is +/- 2%. The margin of error among subgroups (e.g., age cohorts) is higher.
- Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Key Findings

- Most 40+ adults see the benefits to engaging in physical activity and do not find it particularly unpleasant or difficult. For example, three quarters believe exercise would improve their health, physical fitness, and quality of life.
- While an overwhelming majority of adults see the benefits of exercise, only half (56%) are engaging in some form of exercise. Furthermore, only 34% are meeting the Global Council on Brain Health (GCBH) recommendations of 150 minutes per week of moderate to vigorous activity.
- African American adults report less physical activity than the general population whereas Asian adults report more. There was little difference by age or gender among 40+ adults.
- Walking is the most common form of exercise reported with 53% of 40+ adults saying they walk for exercise. A lesser percentage are engaging in more vigorous activity such as strength training/weight training (15%) or running/jogging (8%).
- The largest share of non-exercisers are “contemplators” in that they see the benefits and are considering taking up exercise (34%). About one-quarter (24%) are considered “non-believers” and see no need for exercise. Two in ten (19%) are “preparers” and say they have a firm plan to begin exercising in the near future.

Key Findings

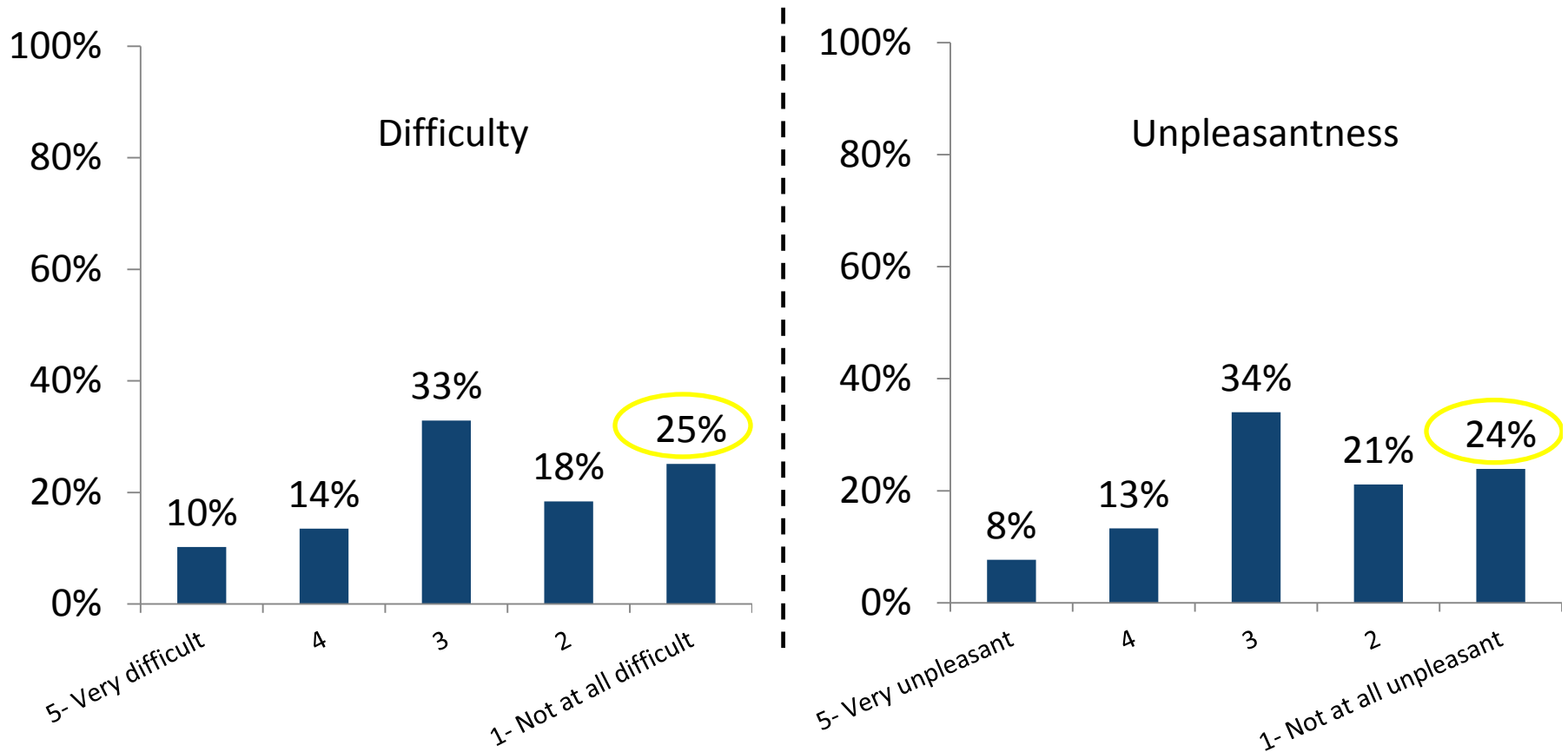
- The top barriers to exercise are highly varied; however, the most commonly reported barriers to exercise are a lack of enjoyment and will power.
- Having willpower, enjoying exercise, identification as an “exerciser” and feeling like you have the energy to exercise are the key factors that differentiate exercisers from non-exercisers.
- The most common leisure activity that 40+ adults would give up if they were to engage in exercise is watching TV/streaming movies (65%).
- When it comes to health, most adults rate their brain health higher than their overall health. For example, 45% say their overall health is “excellent” or “very good” compared to 64% who say their brain health is “excellent” or “very good”.
- African Americans and Hispanic/Latino adults tend to rate both their overall health and brain health less positively than the general population

Key Findings

- While there are differences in overall health ratings by age with younger adults rating their health slightly better, there are no age differences when it comes to brain health ratings.
- While many say their wisdom (49%) and life satisfaction (35%) has increased over the years, more than one-third (37%) say their ability to remember things has declined in the last five years.
- 40+ adults who exercise were much more likely to rate their brain health higher compared to non-exercisers.
- 40+ adults who exercise were much more likely to say their mental abilities have increased over the last five years (e.g., memory, ability to pay attention, decision-making, etc.) compared to non-exercisers.
- Almost six in ten 40+ adults think they weigh more than they should for their height. About half of 40+ adults track their weight (51%). One-third (36%) track their diet and sleep. Three in ten are tracking their health measures via a computer, app or wearable device (30%).

Views about regular exercise

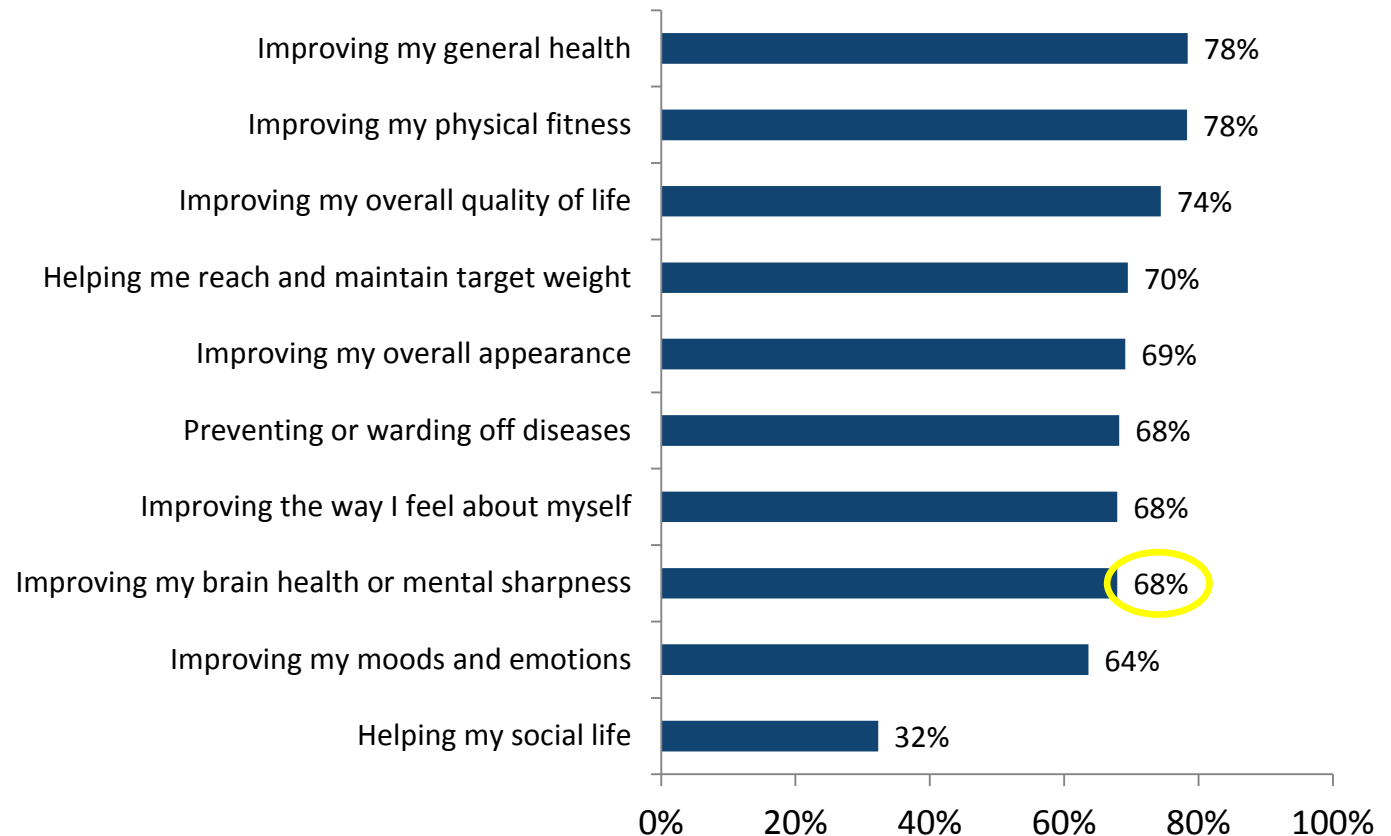
When it comes to thoughts about exercise, most adults do not find it particularly difficult or unpleasant. In fact, one-quarter say it is not at all difficult or unpleasant.



Q6: Considering this, how difficult or unpleasant is it, or would it be, for you to do regular exercise as defined above? Difficult (scale 1 to 5 with 1 being very difficult and 5 being not difficult at all) and unpleasant (scale 1 to 5 with 1 being very unpleasant and 5 being not unpleasant at all)

40+ Americans recognize the many benefits of exercise. Three-quarters agree regular exercise would improve their general health, physical fitness, and overall quality of life. More than-two thirds feel it would benefit their brain health or mental sharpness.

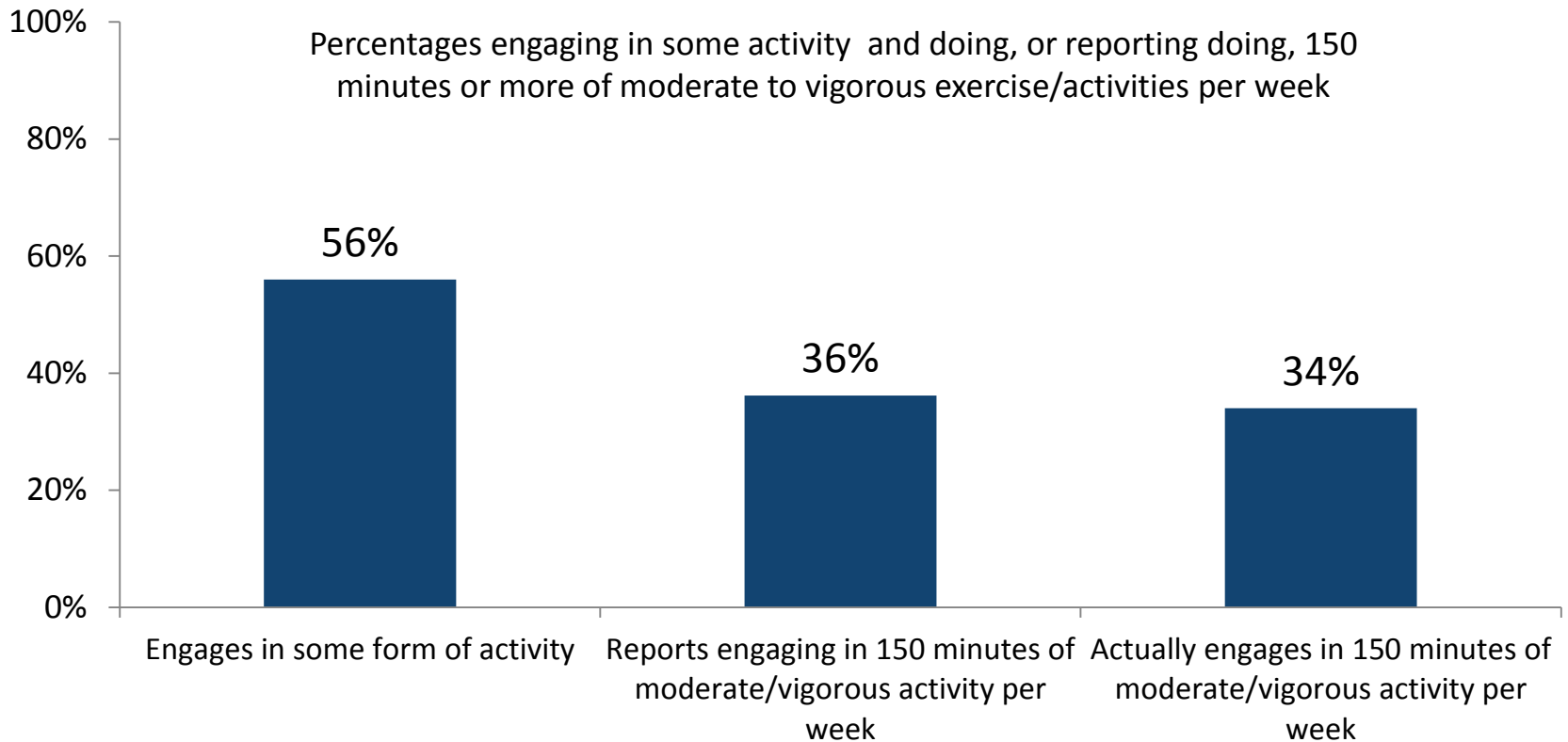
Generally, a higher percentage of Hispanic/Latinos see the benefits of regular exercise compared to the general population.



Q10: Thinking about the benefits, or potential benefits, of doing regular exercise (that is, exercising 150 minutes a week, with mostly doing moderate-to-vigorous activities that increases one's heart rate), please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements. For me, the benefit of exercising regularly is, or would be: (1-3 "(Net) Disagree", 4 = "Neither agree nor disagree", 5-7="(Net) "Agree")

Exercise Activities

Americans prove to be fairly reliable reporters of their exercise habits. More than one third (36%) report engaging in at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise per week and a similar, but slightly lower, percentage (34%) actually do that much exercise per week (when asked to report actual physical activities and minutes per week) . Over half (56%) do some form of exercise each week.



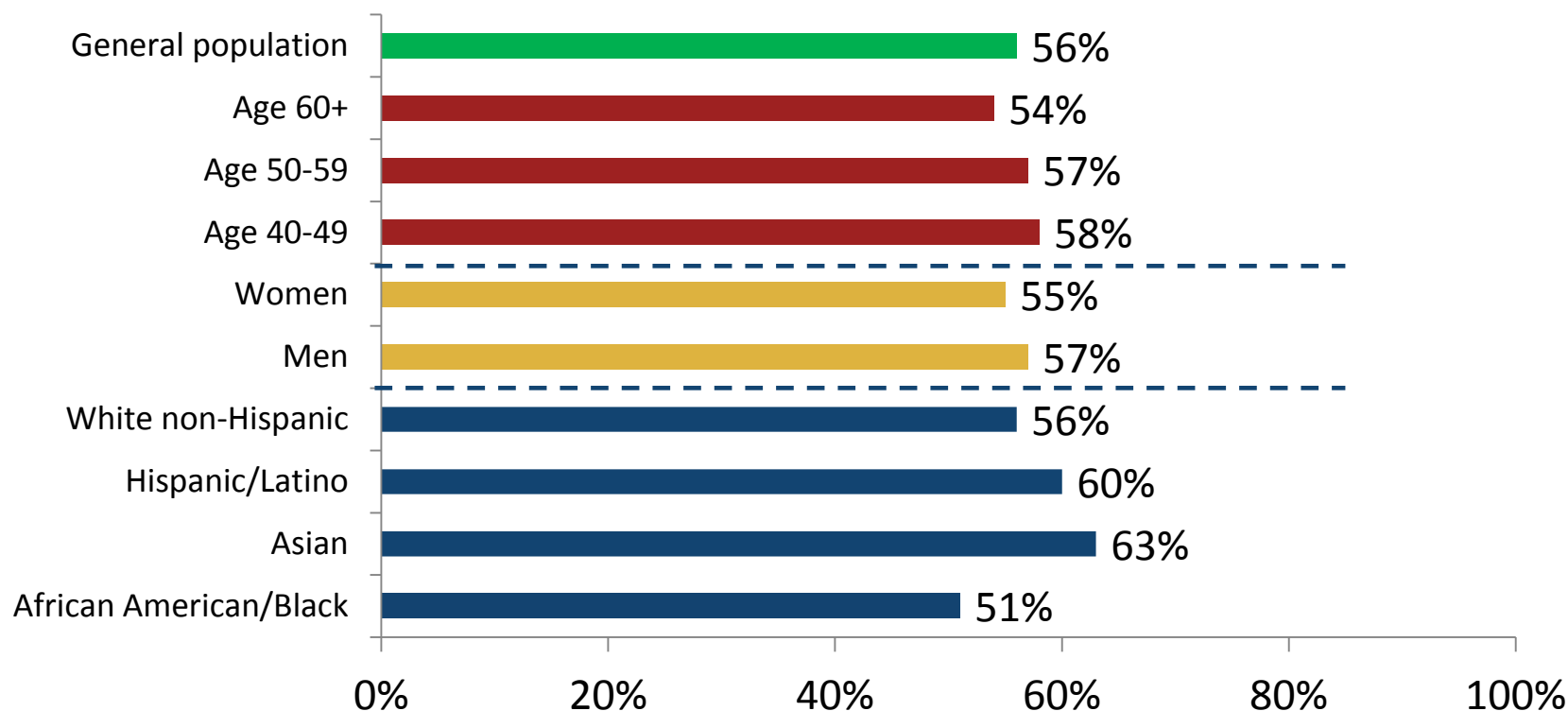
Q4a: You mentioned [exercise/activity] as an activity you do, on average, how much time do you spend per week on [exercise/activity]?

Q4b: What is the intensity level for each of the sports/activities mentioned?

Sum of all exercises and activities done at light/moderate/vigorous intensity converted into equivalents of the level of intensity specified in GCBH exercise recommendations.

Over half (56%) of adults age 40+ get some form of weekly exercise even if it is not the Global Council on Brain Health's (GCBH) recommended amount of 150 moderate to vigorous minutes per week. There was little difference by age, gender, and race/ethnicity.

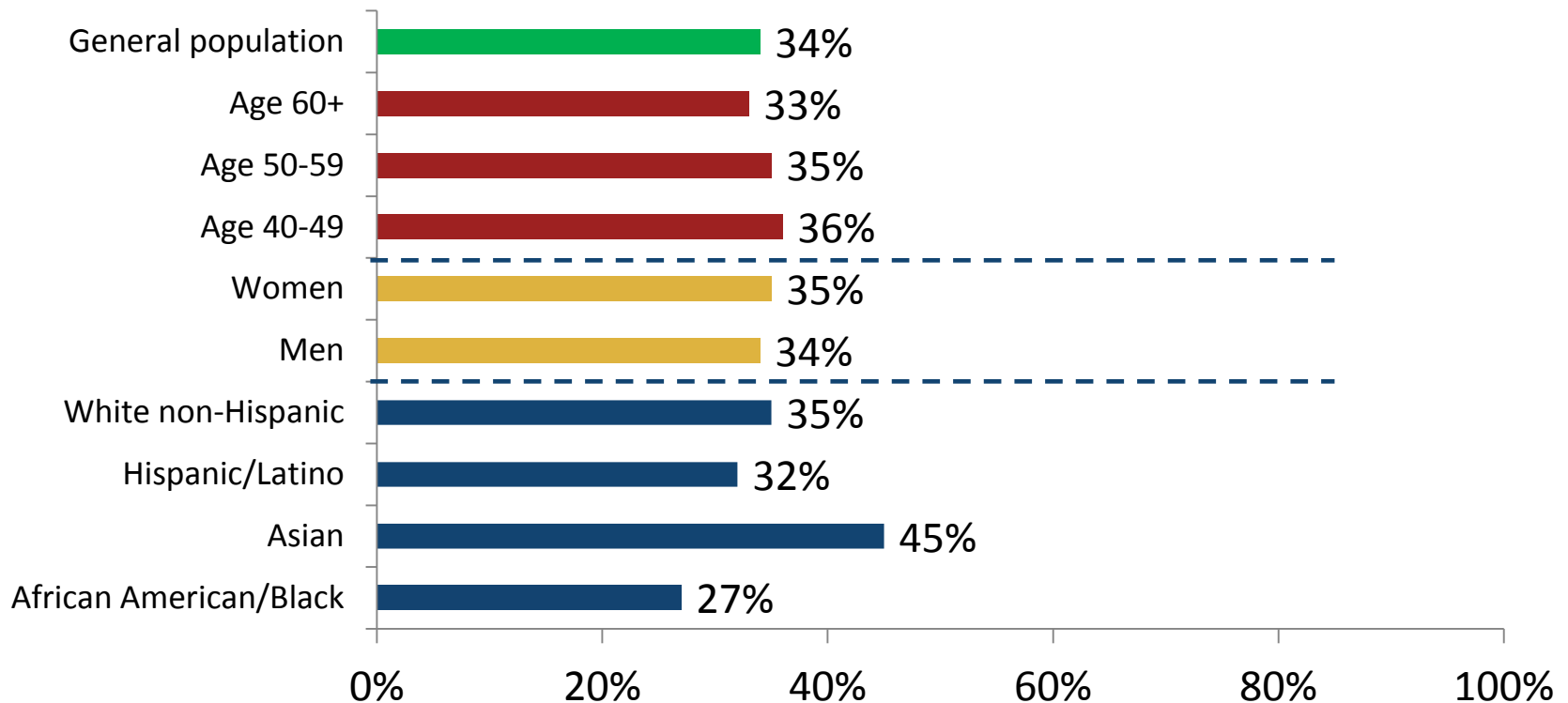
Percent who get any exercise each week by gender, age, and race/ethnicity



Sum of all exercises and activities done at moderate/vigorous intensity

About one-third of adults age 40+ get the Global Council on Brain Health (GCBH) recommended weekly amount of regular exercise of 150 minutes per week. While there was little difference by age and gender, significantly more Asians and significant fewer African Americans/Blacks are getting enough exercise.

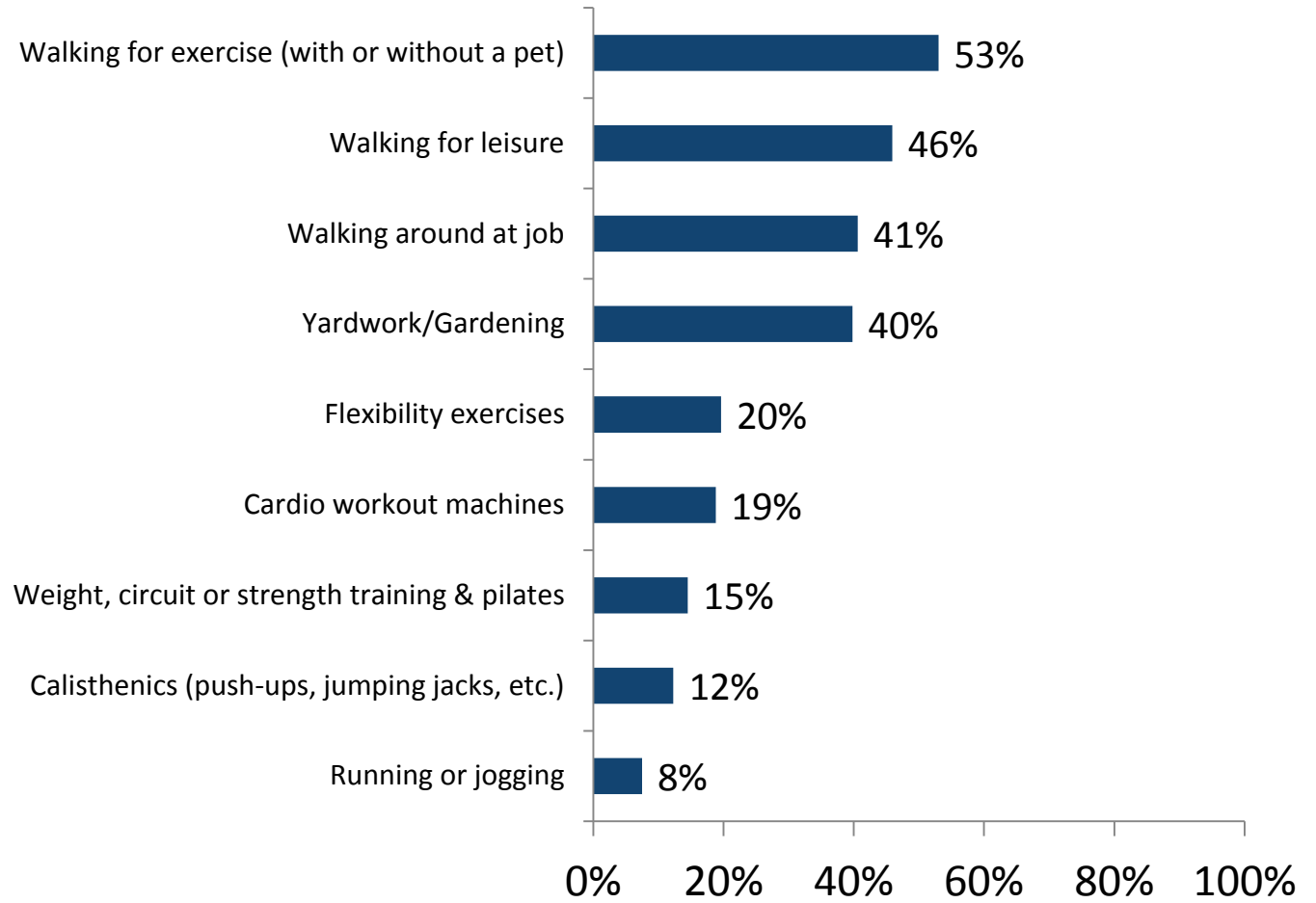
Percent who get the GCBH recommended amount of moderate/vigorous exercise each week by gender, age, and race/ethnicity



Sum of all exercises and activities done at moderate/vigorous intensity

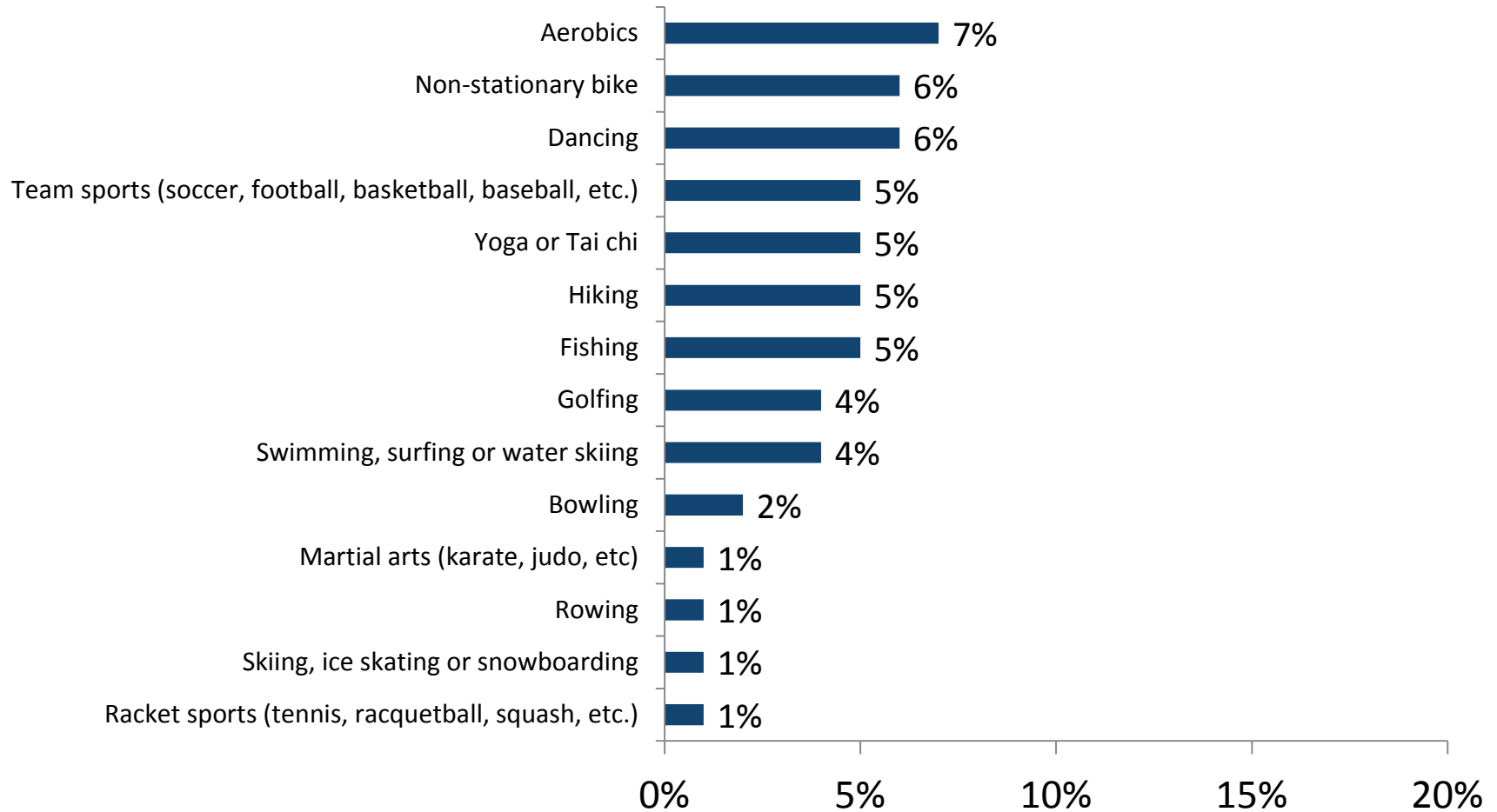
Walking is the most commonly-reported physical activity among 40+ adults -- be it at home or at work, for leisure or for exercise.

African Americans/Blacks tend to report less participation in these activities.



Q4: During a typical week, which of the following sports or physical activities do you do?

Secondary activities that 40+ adults engage in are aerobics, riding a non-stationary bike, dancing and team sports.



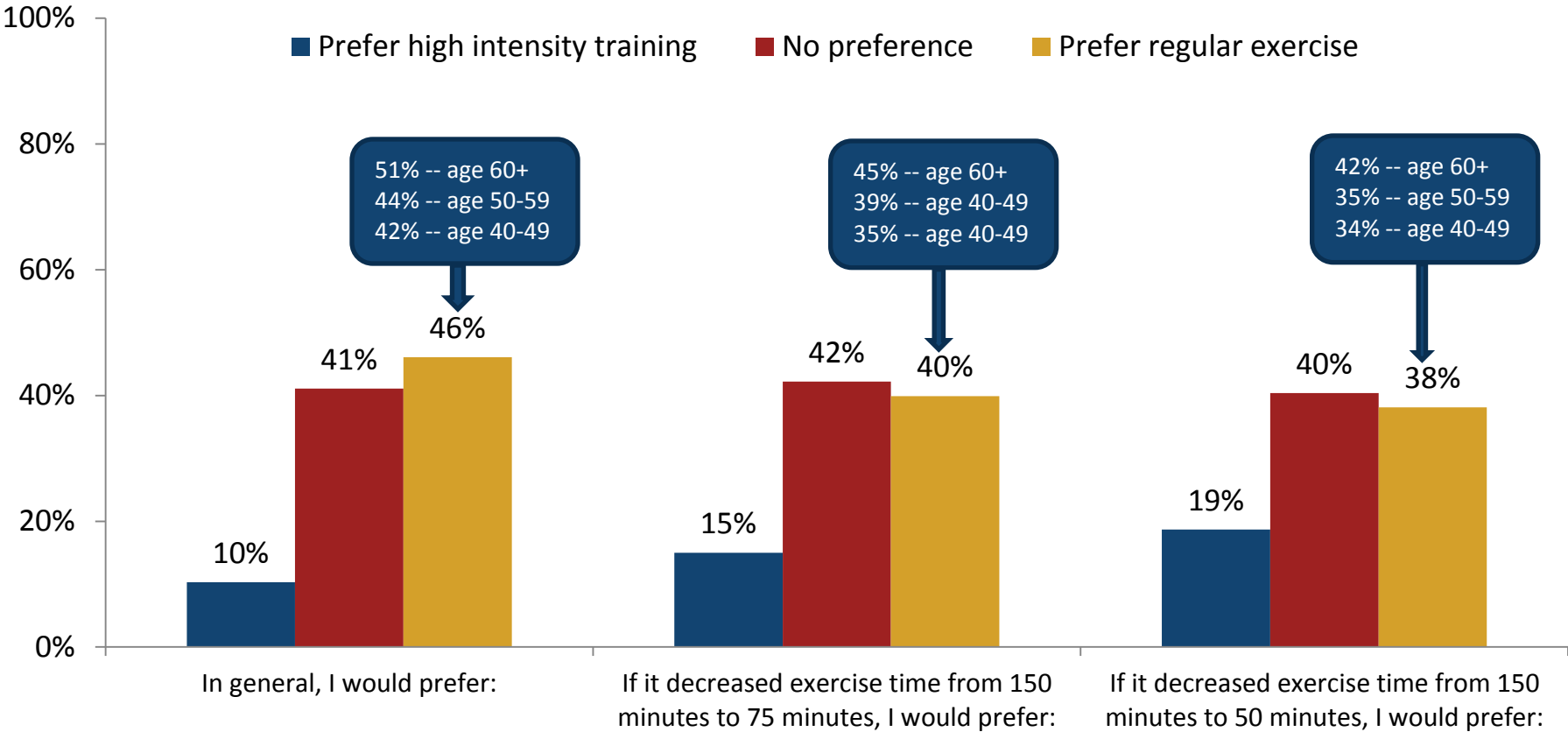
Q4: During a typical week, which of the following sports or physical activities do you do?

The top 10 physical activities are similar across groups but the percent who engage in each activity varies. A higher percentage of Asians compared to the general population walk for exercise and leisure. The engagement in yardwork and gardening increases significantly by age. Asians and Hispanics/Latinos are more likely to run or jog and adults 60+ are less likely to do so.

Percent who engage by gender, age, and race/ethnicity for the top 10 physical activities

Activity	General population	African American/ Black	Asian	Hispanic	Men	Women	Age 40-49	Age 50-59	Age 60+
Walking for exercise	53%	50%	61%	52%	48%	56%	49%	53%	55%
Walking for leisure	46%	43%	55%	43%	43%	49%	43%	46%	49%
Walking around at job	41%	40%	40%	31%	40%	42%	44%	44%	34%
Yardwork/gardening	40%	25%	34%	33%	41%	38%	29%	42%	46%
Flexibility exercise	20%	16%	19%	13%	16%	20%	14%	18%	23%
Cardio machine	19%	14%	23%	17%	20%	18%	20%	19%	17%
Weight training	15%	11%	17%	11%	17%	13%	16%	16%	12%
Calisthenics	12%	11%	18%	14%	15%	10%	16%	13%	9%
Running or jogging	8%	6%	14%	16%	11%	4%	13%	7%	2%
Aerobics	7%	6%	8%	9%	3%	10%	9%	6%	6%

While high intensity interval training (HIIT) requires less time, few prefer this as an option for exercise even when it reduces exercise time by one-third. More adults age 60+ prefer regular exercise over HIIT compared to younger cohorts.



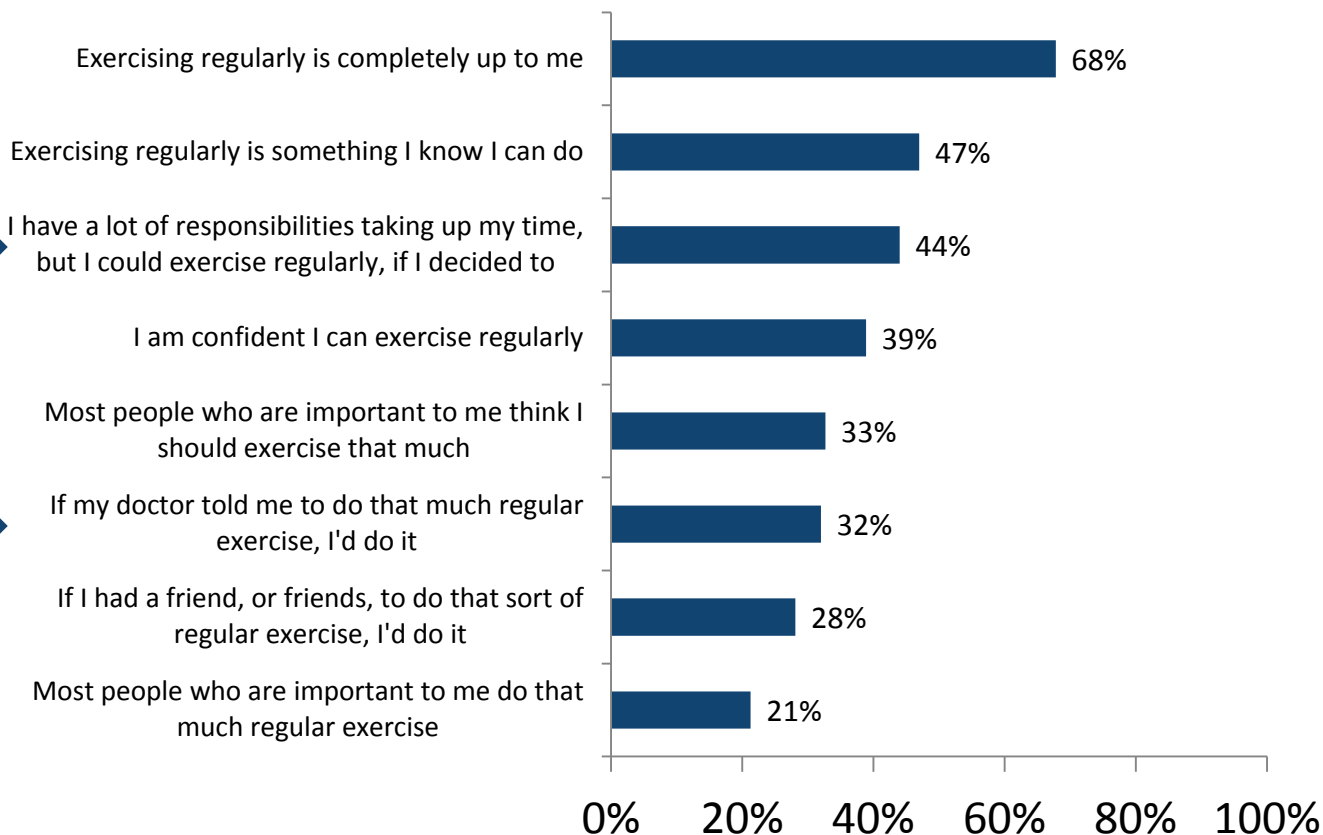
Q9: High intensity training is a more strenuous form of exercise than regular exercise, but it takes less time. It involves doing short bursts of activity in which your heart rate is nearly up to its maximum. High intensity training involves more exertion (which may be uncomfortable) than regular exercise but it takes less time. If the two forms of exercise provided the same health benefits, which would sound preferable to you doing regular exercise or high intensity training? (1=strong preference for high intensity training, 3=no preference, 5=strong preference for regular exercise).

Barriers to exercise

Among 40+ adults who do not currently get regular exercise, nearly seven in 10 (68%) feel that their personal choice is a determining factor of whether they exercise regularly or not. Less than half, however, say they know that exercising regularly is something they can do.

Younger adults age 40-49 (52%) have more responsibilities interfering with exercise compared to adults age 50-59 (47%) and 60+ (42%)

African Americans/Blacks (39%), Asians (38%) and Hispanic/Latinos (40%) are more likely to be influenced by their doctor

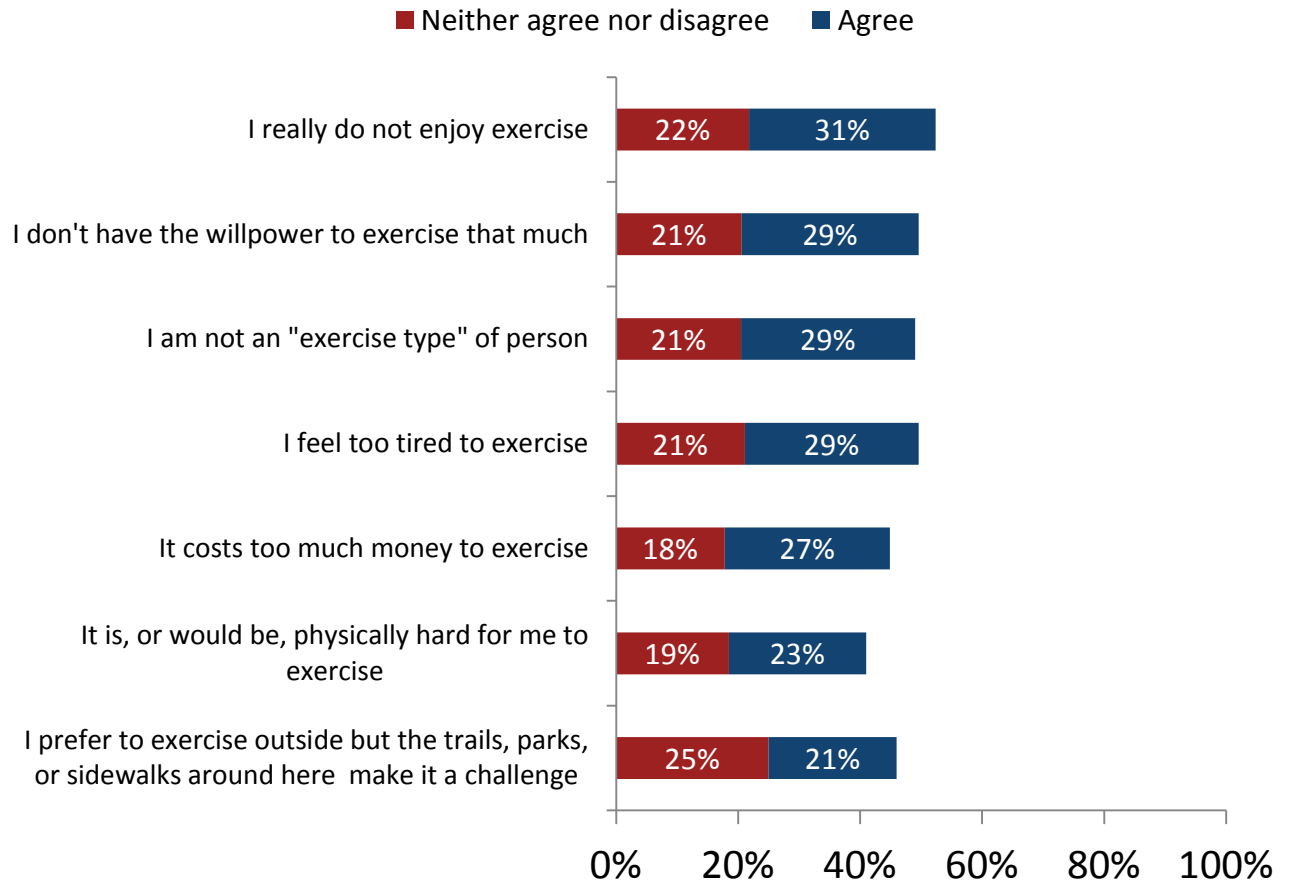


Q12: Based on medical studies, it is recommended that adults exercise 150 minutes a week with most of their exercise being vigorous- to moderate- exercise activity. This level of exercise is referred to as regular exercise. With that level of exercise in mind, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements. (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree)

The top barriers to regular exercise among non-exercising 40+ adults are highly varied. The top two obstacles overall indicate that adults do not like exercising and therefore do not have the willpower to stick with it.

Differences in the obstacles to exercise were evident by race/ethnicity:

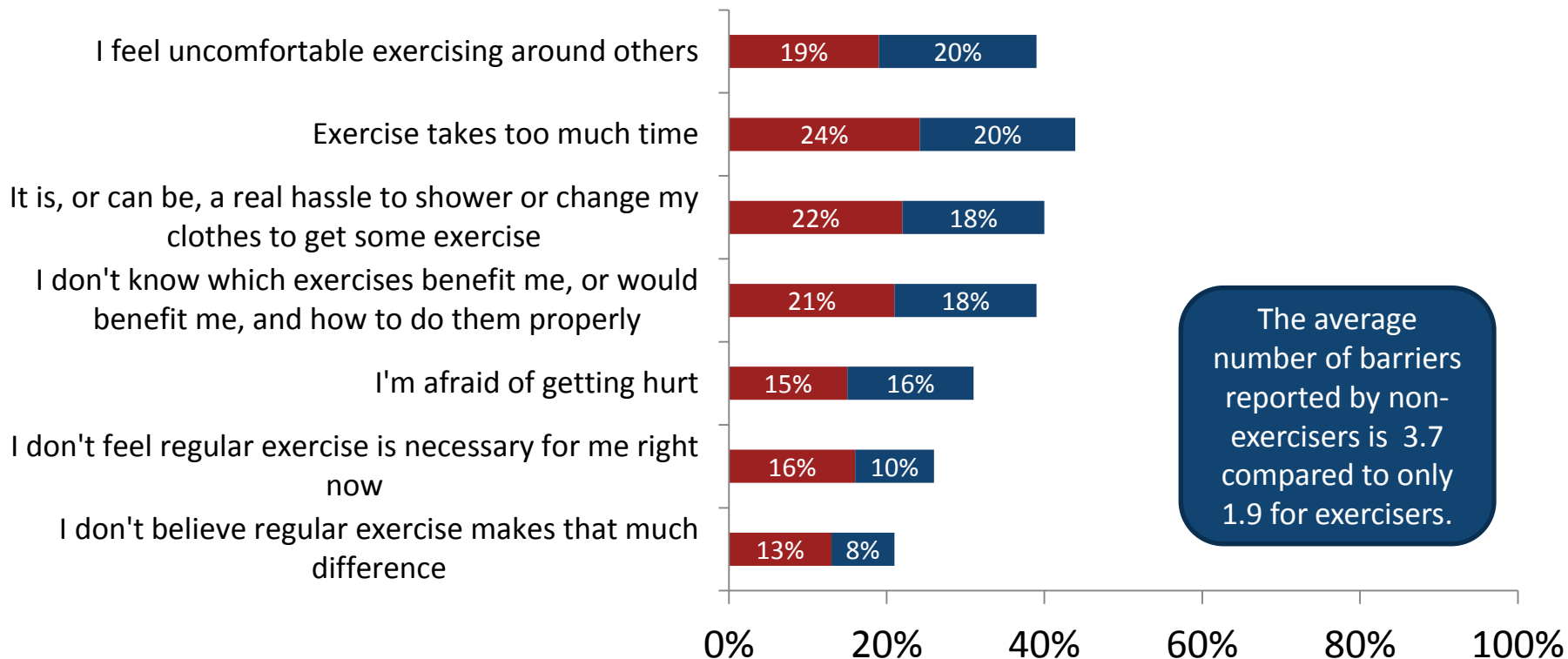
- Fewer African American/Blacks, Asians, and Hispanic/Latinos say they do not enjoy exercise.
- Fewer African American/Blacks say they don't have the willpower to exercise.
- Fewer African American/Blacks, and Hispanic/Latinos say they are not an "exercise type" of person.
- More Hispanic/Latinos say they prefer to exercise outside but their outdoor environment makes it a challenge.



Q11: Thinking about the obstacles to regular exercise (that is, exercising 150 minutes a week, with mostly doing moderate-to-vigorous activities that increase one's heart rate), please indicate how strongly you would agree or disagree with the following statements. (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree)

The less common barriers to regular exercise among 40+ adults are also varied. Some are related to logistical aspects -- the hassle of changing clothes and the awkwardness of exercising around others. The remaining reasons all seem to questions whether the benefits of exercise outweigh its costs (be it time, injury, or information costs).

■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Agree



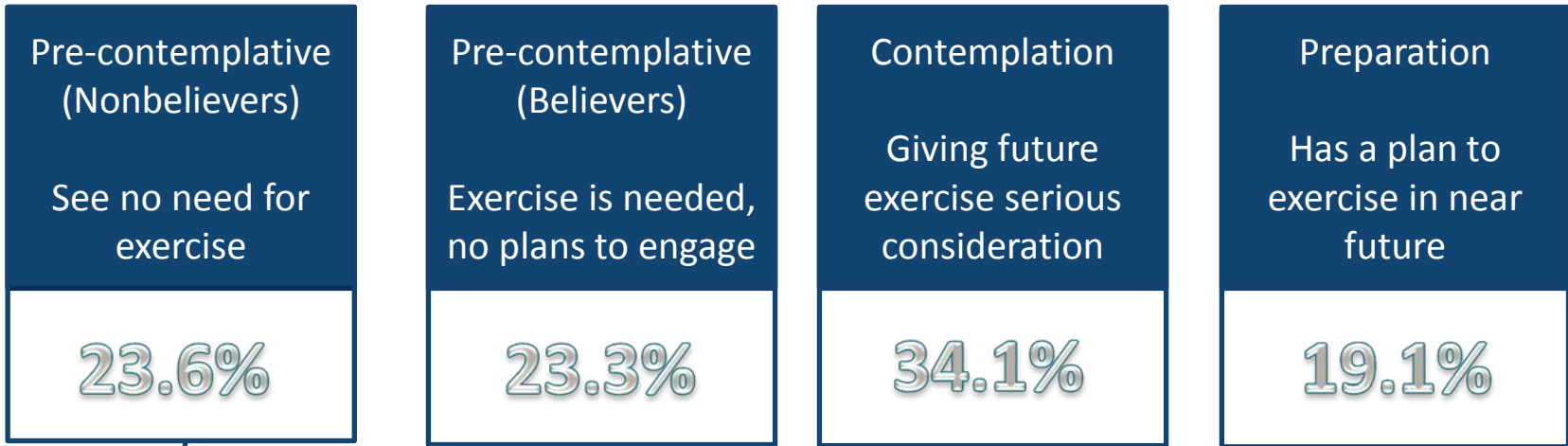
Q11: Thinking about the obstacles to regular exercise (that is, exercising 150 minutes a week, with mostly doing moderate-to-vigorous activities that increase one's heart rate), please indicate how strongly you would agree or disagree with the following statements. (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree)

It comes as no surprise that there are major differences in barriers between exercisers and non-exercisers. The largest differences are in enjoyment, will, fatigue, and identity.

	TOTAL "Agree"	Non-exerciser "Agree"	Exercisers "Agree"	Non-exerciser-Exerciser
I really do not enjoy exercise	31%	39%	17%	+22%
I don't have the willpower to exercise that much	29%	39%	13%	+26%
I feel too tired to exercise	29%	36%	14%	+23%
I am not an "exercise type" of person	29%	37%	13%	+24%
It costs too much money to exercise	27%	31%	20%	+11%
It is, or would be, physically hard for me to exercise	23%	30%	11%	+19%
I prefer to exercise outside but the trails, parks, or sidewalks around here make it a challenge	21%	21%	19%	+2%
I feel uncomfortable exercising around others	20%	28%	17%	+12%
Exercise takes too much time	20%	24%	12%	+12%
It is, or can be, a real hassle to shower or change my clothes to get some exercise	18%	21%	14%	+8%
I don't know which exercises benefit me, or would benefit me, and how to do them properly	18%	23%	13%	+10%
I'm afraid of getting hurt	16%	19%	10%	+9%
I don't feel regular exercise is necessary for me right now	10%	12%	8%	+4%
I don't believe regular exercise makes that much difference	8%	8%	7%	+1%

While nearly one-quarter of 40+ adults who do not engage in regular exercise see no need for it, more than half are either contemplating exercise or preparing to exercise in the near future. This suggests that a majority of non-exercisers have the potential and the frame of mind to become regular exercisers.

Stages of change*



Fewer older adults are nonbelievers:

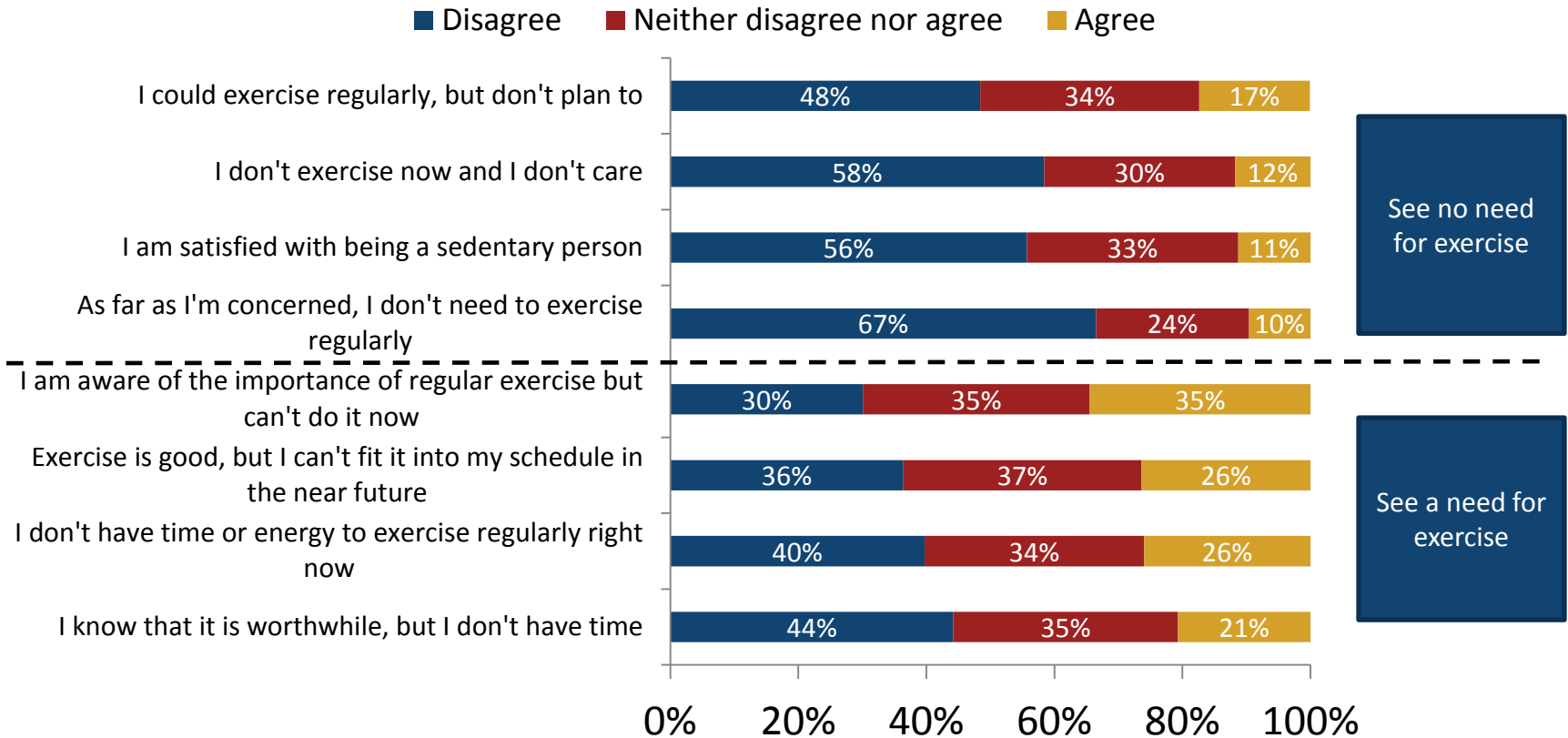
- 11% -- 60+
- 17% -- 50-59
- 15% -- 40-49

Fewer men are nonbelievers:

- 11% -- men
- 18% -- women

*Reed GR. Measuring Stages of Change for Exercise. Island: University of Rhode Island; 1995. Doctor in Philosophy.

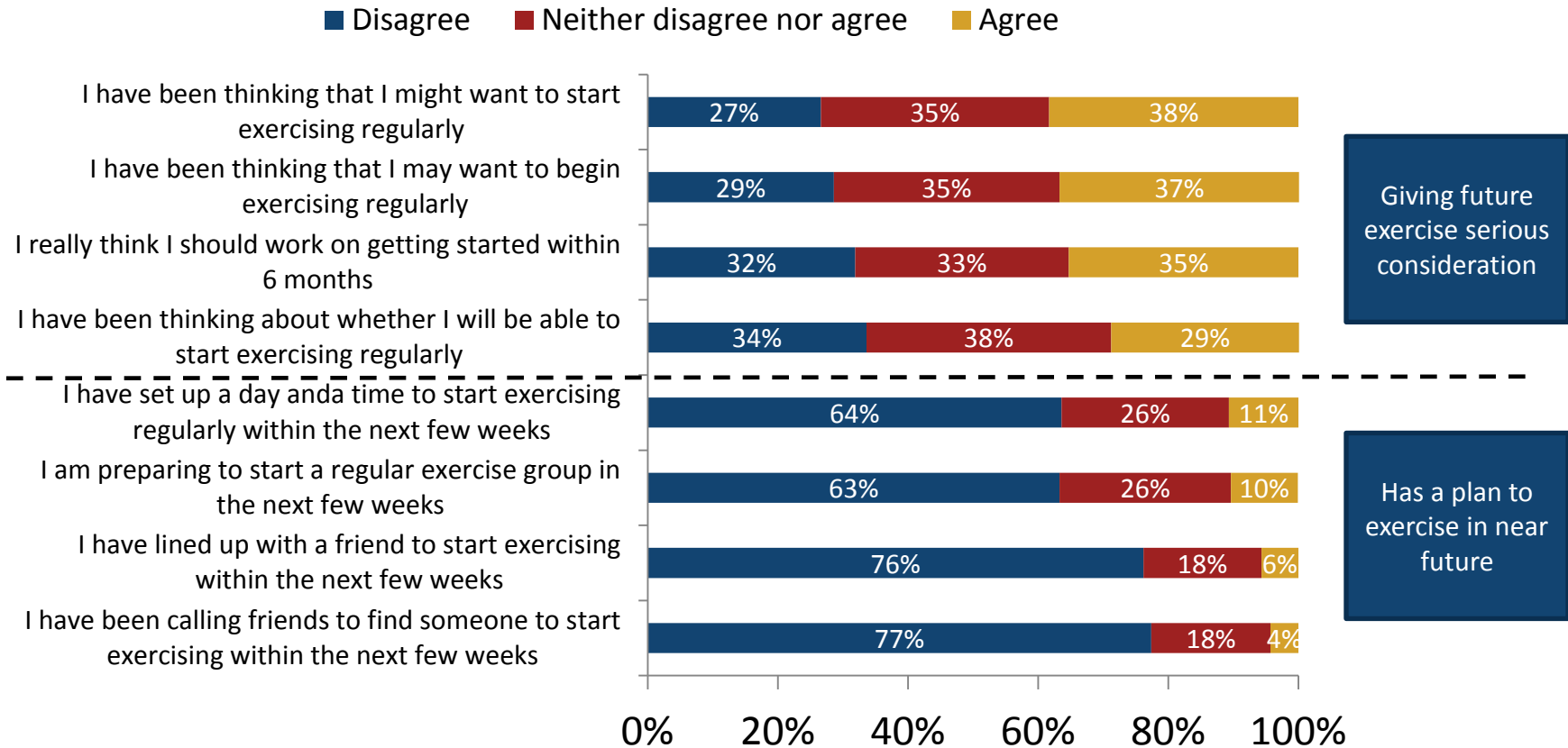
Among adults who do not exercise regularly, only about one in 10 say they are satisfied being a sedentary person and do not need to exercise regularly. A higher proportion of respondents believe in exercise yet they have no plans to exercise in the future.*



Q8a: Again with the same level of exercise in mind, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements. (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree).

* These are the items that comprise a measure that identifies how ready people are to change their exercise behavior.

Among adults who do not exercise regularly, about three in 10 or more 40+ adults are contemplating exercising in the future but few, about one in 10 or less, are actually planning to begin exercising in the next few weeks.*

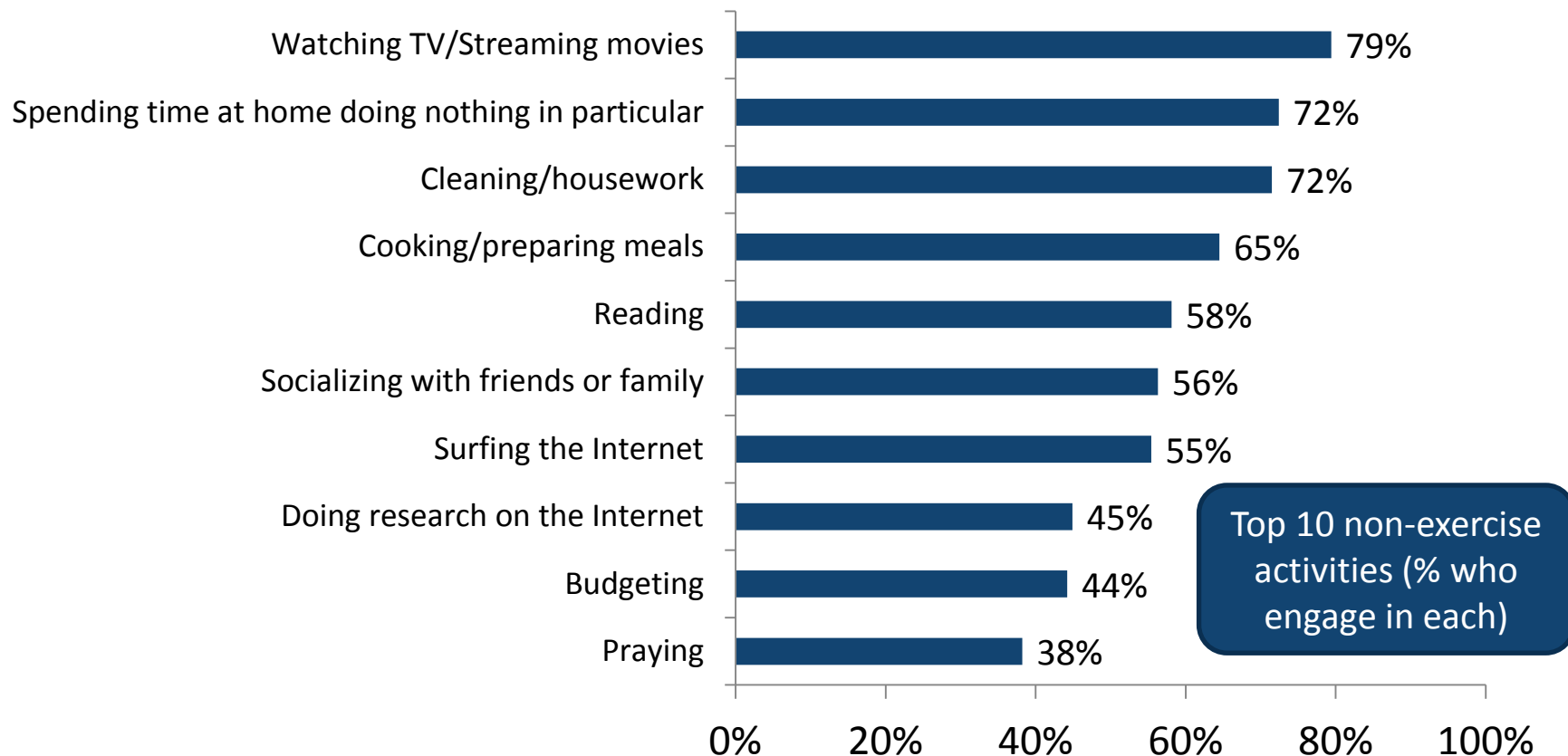


Q8a: Again with the same level of exercise in mind, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements. (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree).

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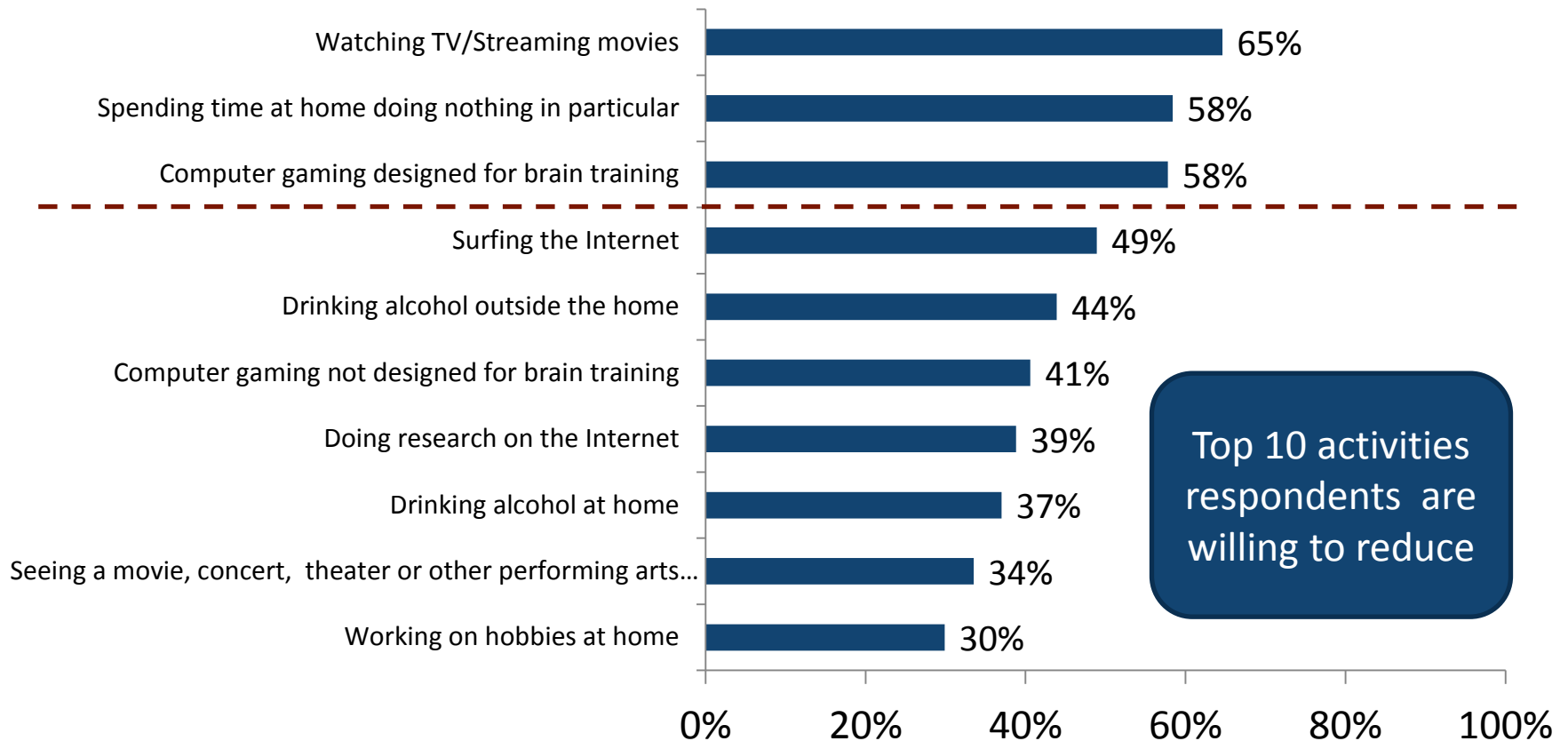
What would 40+ adults give up in order to increase exercise time?

The top ten non-exercise/leisure activities engaged in during a typical week include watching TV (79%), spending time at home (72%), reading (58%) and several household tasks: cleaning/housework (72%), cooking/preparing meals (65%), and budgeting (44%).



Q5: During a typical week, which of the following non-exercise, no-job/commuting activities do you do?

Nearly two-thirds of 40+ adults said they would watch less TV if they were to devote more time to exercise.

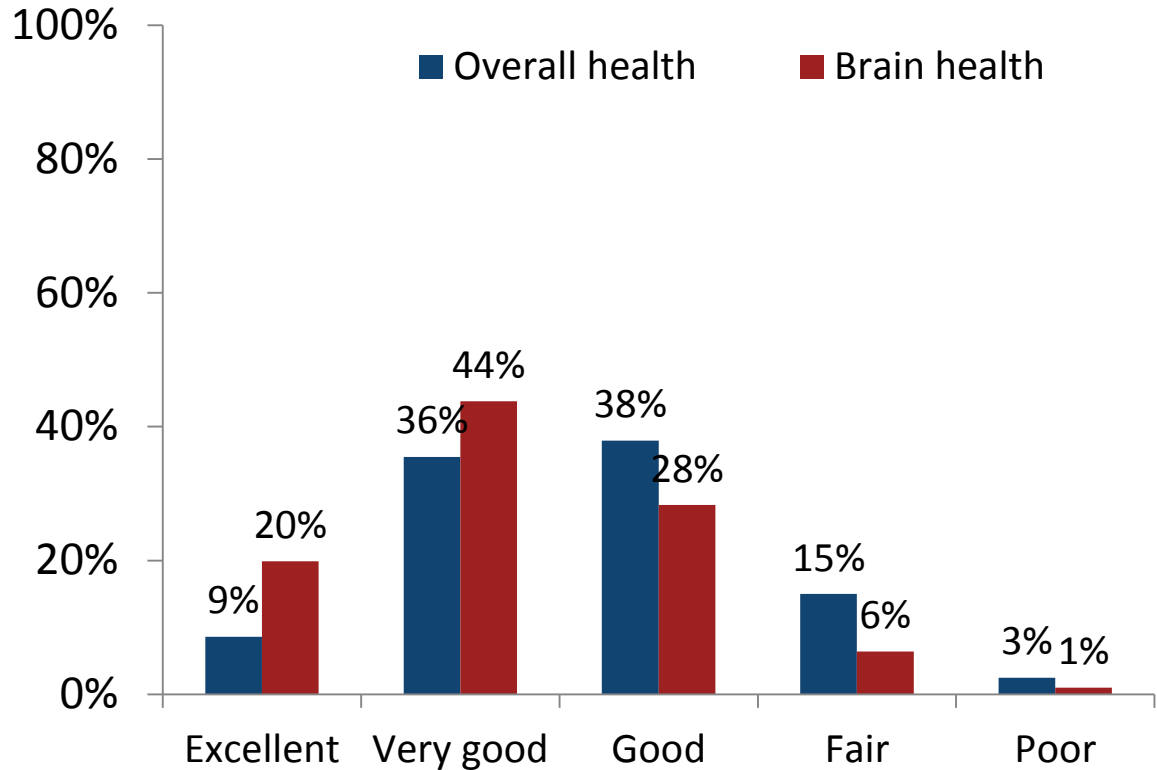


Q13: Whether or not it is likely, suppose you were to devote more time to exercise. Which of the following would you spend less time doing?

Exercise and brain health

Adults say their brain health is better than their general health. Over six in 10 (64%) 40+ adults report that their brain health is excellent or very good compared to the over four in 10 (45%) who regard their overall health the same way. Fewer African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino adults report that their overall health and brain health are excellent or very good compared to Asians and the general population. Adults in younger age groups report better overall health but reported brain health is similar across all age groups.

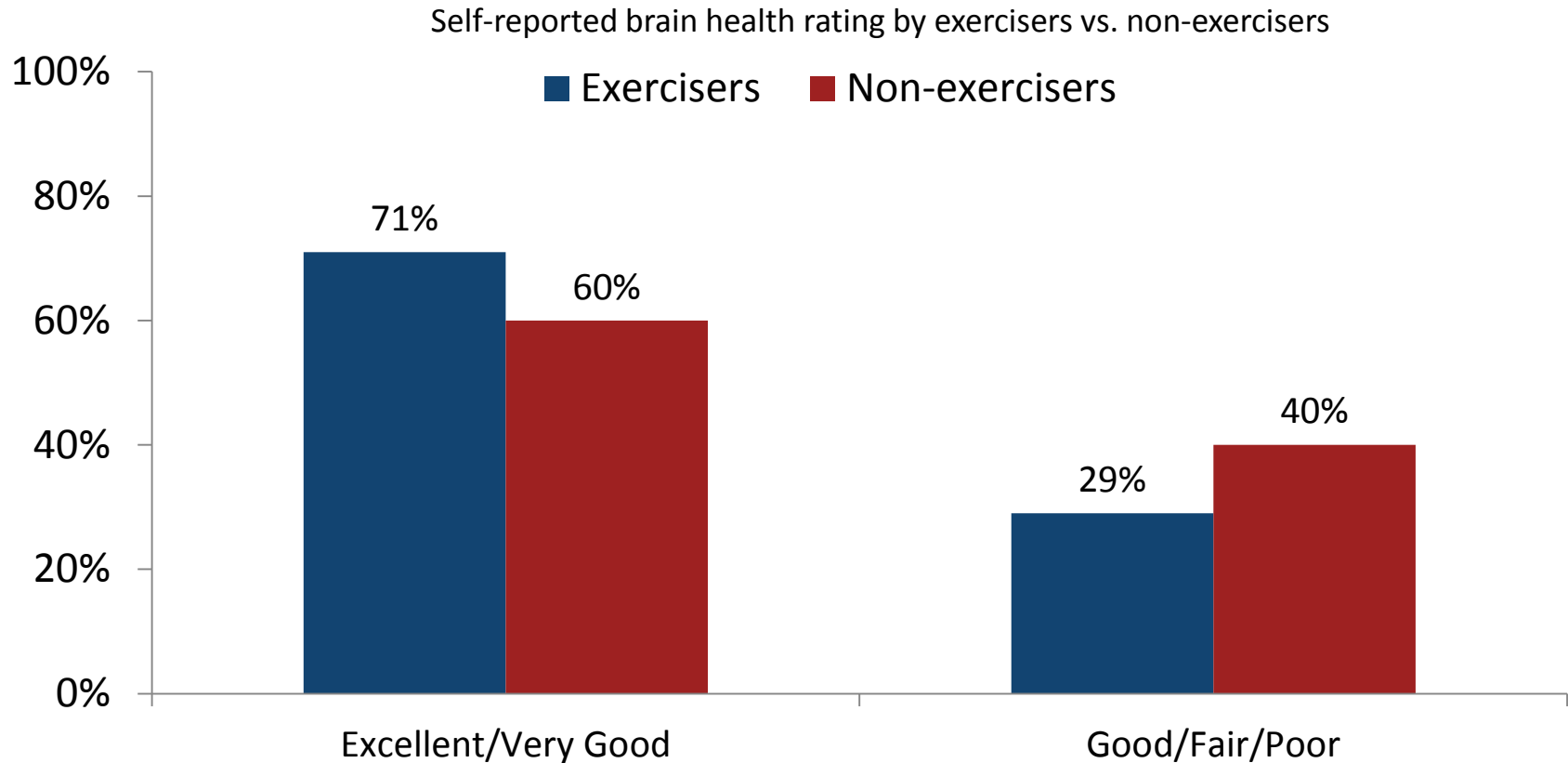
Status	% Excellent and very good	
	Overall health	Brain health
African American/Black	36%	57%
Asian	48%	64%
Hispanic/Latino	33%	54%
Age 40-49	49%	66%
Age 50-59	44%	62%
Age 60+	43%	64%



Q1: Would you say that your health is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?

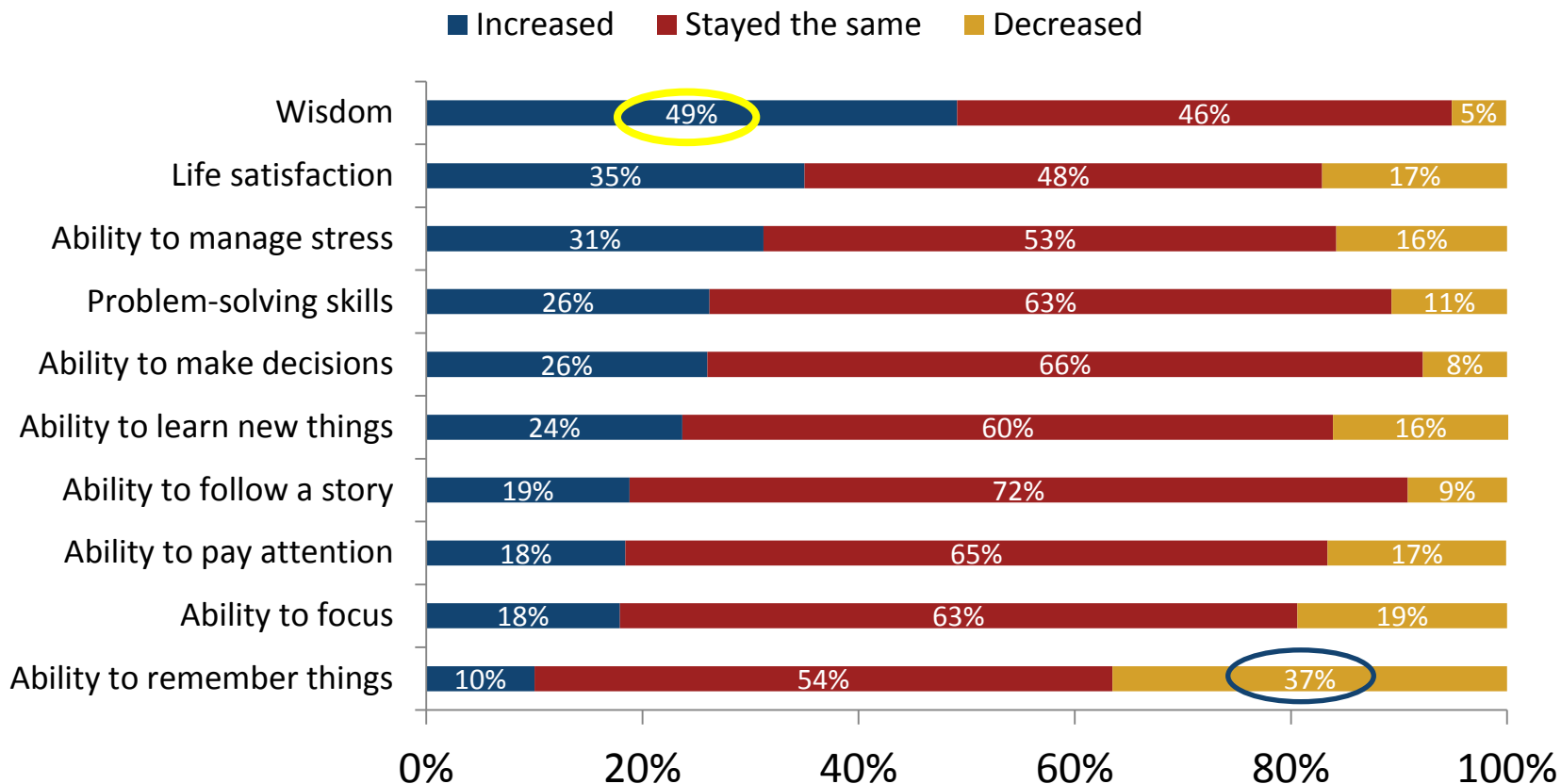
Q2: Getting more specific, would you say that your brain health or mental sharpness is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?

Unsurprisingly, 40+ adults who exercise rate their brain health higher than non-exercisers.



Q2: Getting more specific, would you say that your brain health or mental sharpness is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?

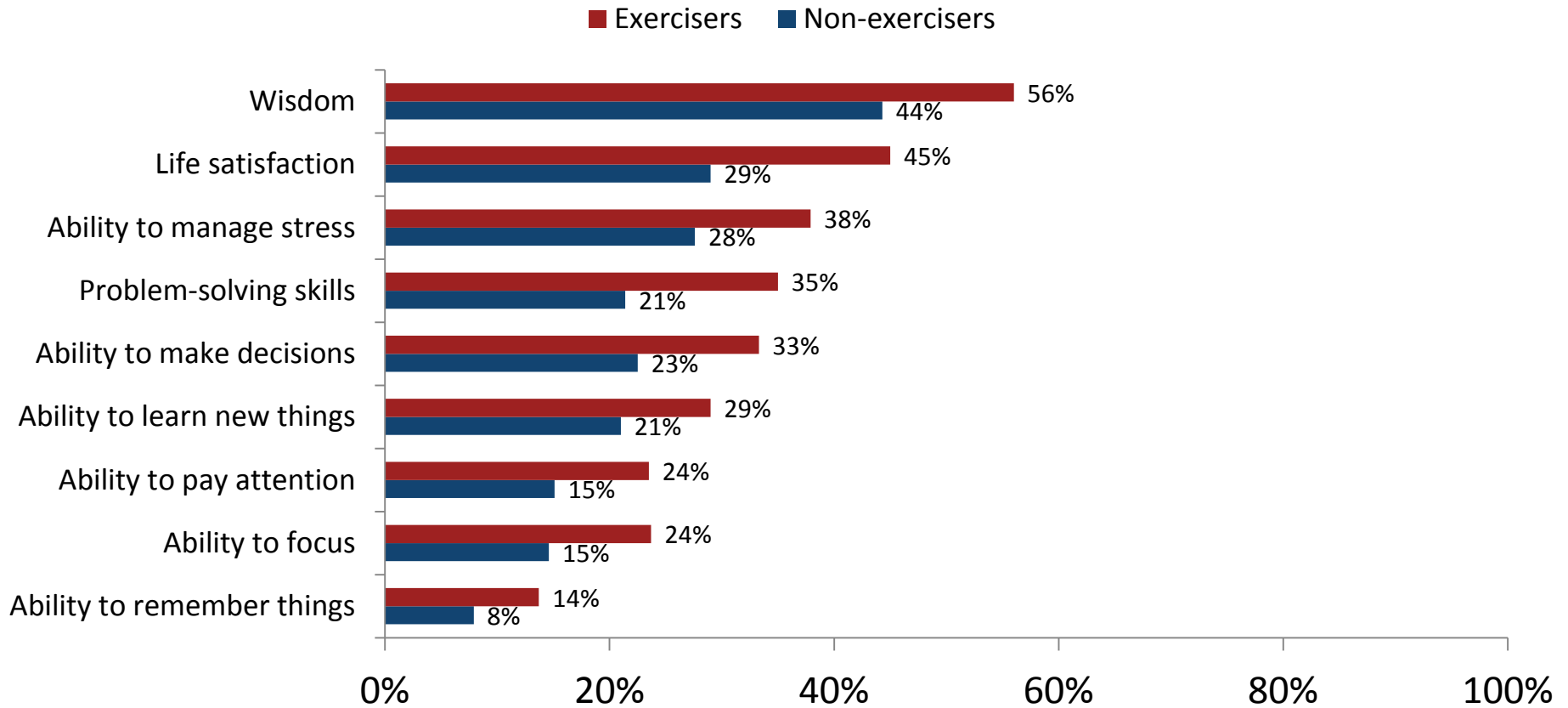
A majority of 40+ adults indicated various mental abilities have stayed the same over the last five years. The good news is that nearly half (49%) say their wisdom has increased and over three in 10 have experienced an increase in their life satisfaction (35%) and their ability to manage stress (31%). Over one-third (37%) of 40+ adults, however, say their ability to remember things has declined.



Q3: In the past five years, has the following increased, stayed the same, or decreased. Is that a little or a lot?

Significantly more 40+ adults who say they exercise regularly saw an increase in various mental abilities in the last five years compared to those who do not exercise regularly.

Percent who have seen an increase in their mental abilities



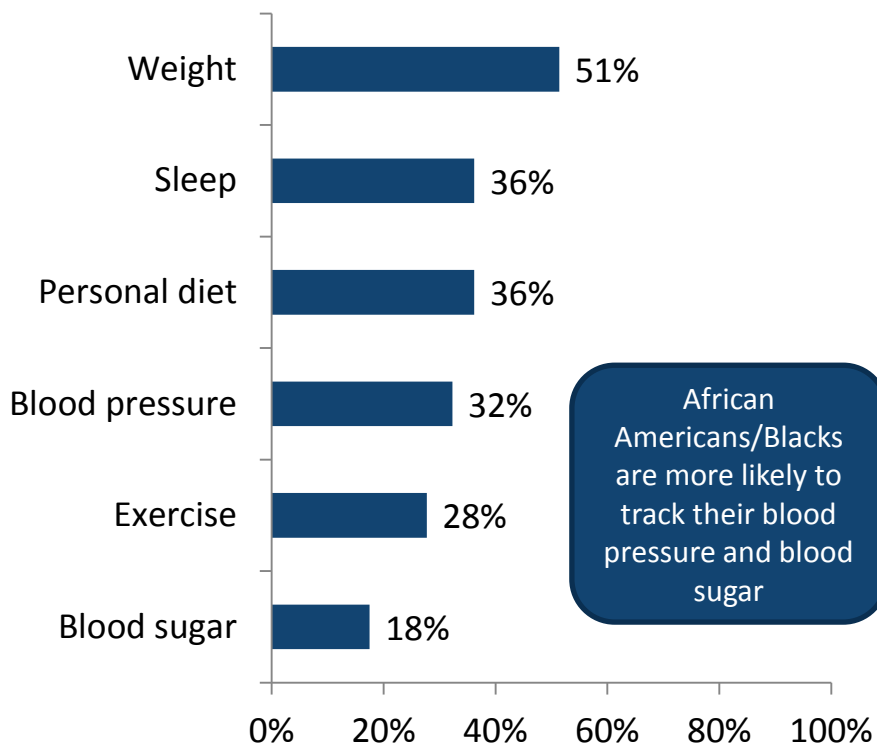
Q3: In the past five years, has the following increased, stayed the same, or decreased. Is that a little or a lot?

Other health behaviors

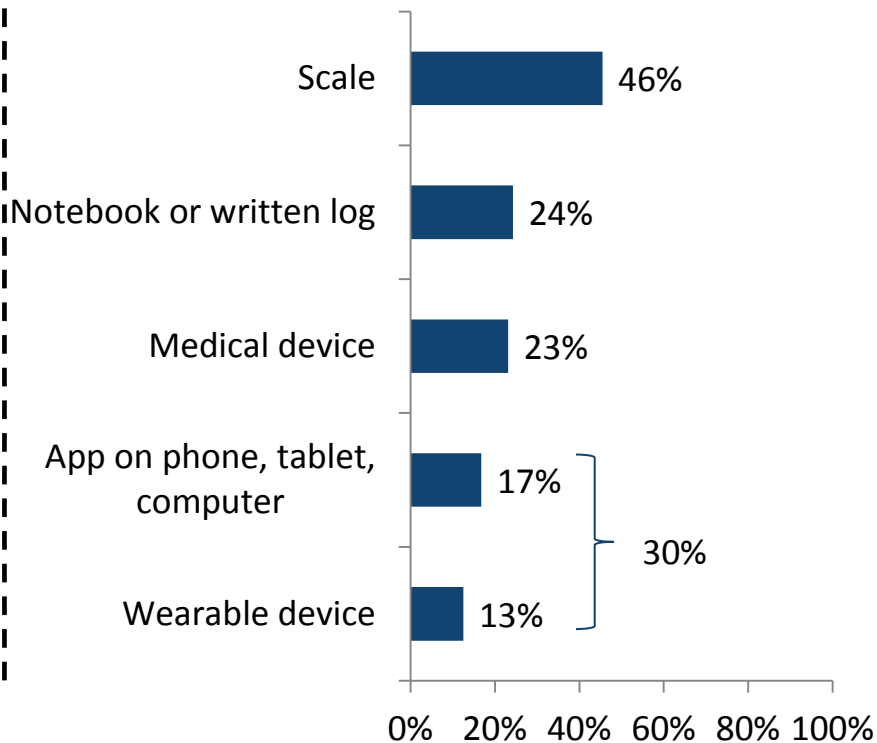
Half (51%) of 40+ adults regularly track their weight. Among those who track certain measures, three in 10 (30%) use an electronic device.

A majority (57%) of respondents said they were more than the proper weight for their height; more women (59%) said this compared to men (54%) and fewer Asians said this (43%).

Percent who track the following



For those who track certain measures, percent who use each tracking method

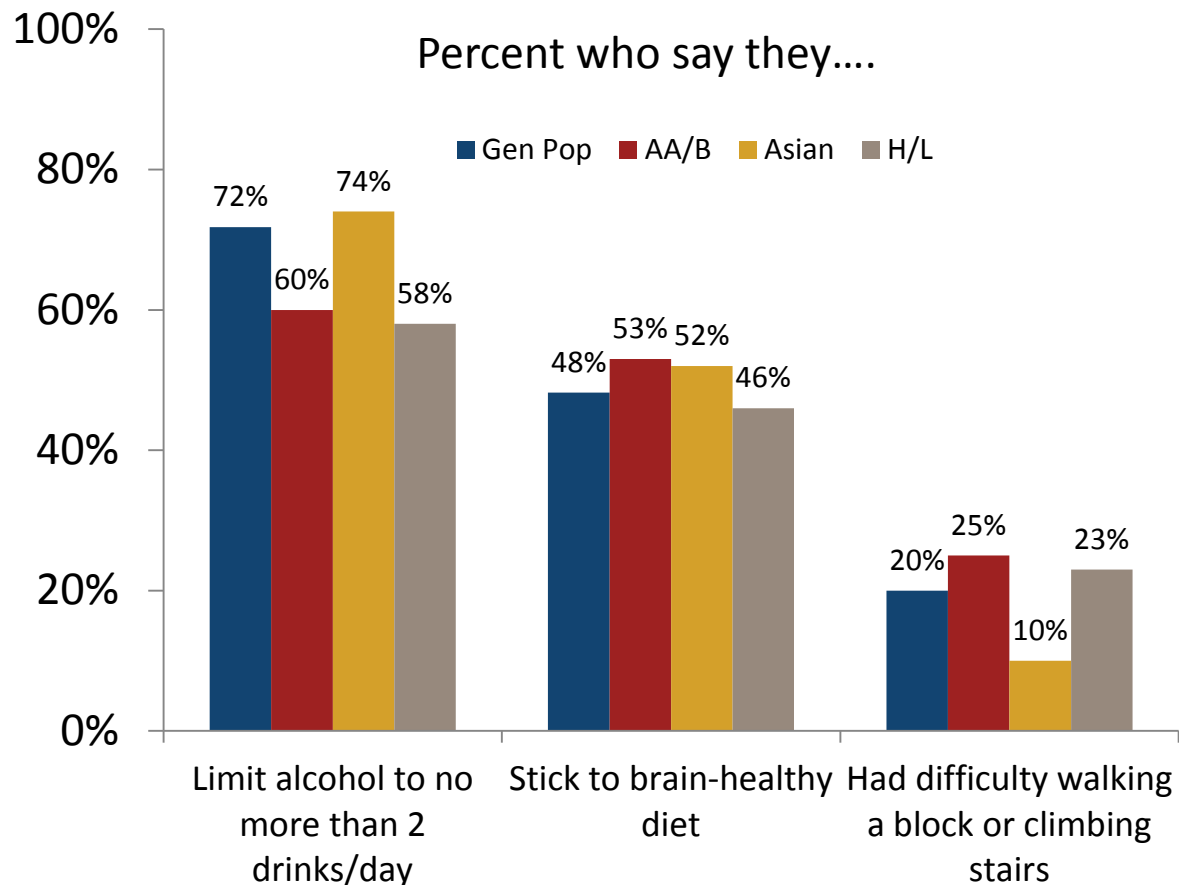


Q7: Which of the following measures do you track on a regular basis?

Q7a: For the activities that you track, what methods do you use to track them?
 Q15: Which sounds most like your view of your weight relative to your height?

Over seven in 10 (72%) 40+ adults say they limit their alcohol intake and nearly half (48%) stick to a brain-healthy diet. One in five had difficulty with mobility in the last month. Some differences were also noted by age with more 60+ adults limiting alcohol (75%) and sticking to a brain-healthy diet (55%).

Activity	Percent who said yes		
	Age 40-49	Age 50-59	Age 60+
Limit alcohol	67%	72%	75%
Brain-healthy diet	42%	43%	55%
Mobility issues	12%	18%	27%



Q14: Do you do the following activities? (yes/no)

Q16: During the past month have you had difficulty walking at least one block or climbing one flight of stairs? (yes/no)