

Sweating Together: Exercise and Social Preferences among Adults 18+

Key Findings

- + The social aspect of exercising can be a motivator for many. Over half (52%) of adults say they have been motivated to engage in exercise because a friend or family member was doing it with them, and they are about twice as likely to do it with family as with friends. However, 70% of adults' exercise time is spent alone.
- + Few adults are getting the recommended amount of exercise per week. Only two in ten adults (19%) say they get 150 minutes of exercise or more per week, and just two in ten (22%) of even know that the recommendation is 150 minutes or more per week.
- + Adults age 50 or older are the least likely to meet the recommended amount compared to younger adults: just 17% say they get 150 minutes or more per week, and a full quarter (26%) of adults age 50+ say they do not exercise at all.
- + The top barrier to exercise is willpower (48%). Many also say that being tired is a barrier, as well as simply not enjoying exercise. Money and weather are also a concern for more than a third of respondents.
- + Walking tops the list for exercise activities, particularly for ages 35-49 and 50+. Other top activities include flexibility exercises like stretching (30%), using cardio workout machines (25%), weight training (24%), and calisthenics (e.g., pushups, jumping jacks, and chin ups; 18%).
- + Top benefits of exercise include improving general health and improving physical fitness. However, while younger adults are equally likely to agree to these two benefits, they are also much more likely than older adults to see many other benefits of exercise such as weight management, brain health, moods, and staying connected.

Methodology

This online survey of 1,025 adults age 18 and over was fielded from April 23-27, 2018 using AARP's proprietary panel. The data are weighted by gender, race, age, Hispanic ethnicity, marital status, census division, age, and income to benchmarks from the March 2018 Current Population Survey (CPS) for persons over the age of 18. Raked weights are estimated using Random Iterative Method (RIM) weighting.



Detailed Findings

Exercise Habits

- Only 19% of adults get the recommended amount of exercise (150 minutes) or more per week. On average, they spend less than 30 minutes exercising per week.
- Adults age 50+ are the least likely to meet the recommended amount compared to younger adults: just 17% say they get 150 minutes or more per week. A full quarter (26%) of adults 50+ say they do not exercise at all, significantly less than those age 18-34 (9%).

During a typical week, how many minutes do you spend exercising?

	Total 18+	Age 18-34	Age 35-49	Age 50+
Base Unweighted	1025	300	259	466
Does not exercise	19%	9%	17% ^a	26% ^{ab}
Less than 30 minutes to under 150	63%	70% ^c	63%	57%
150 minute or more	19%	21%	20%	17%

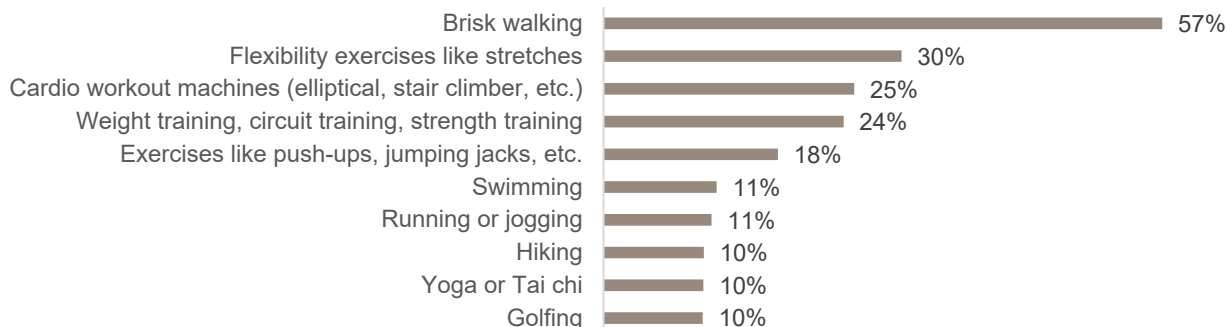
Letters represent a significant difference from column indicated at the 95% confidence level.

- Most exercisers (62%) spend less than half of their time exercising at a moderate to vigorous level (meaning exercise that increases their heart rate and breathing). Just 11% say three-quarters to 100% of their exercise is moderate or vigorous.
 - Adults age 50+ are significantly more likely to say that less than 25% of their exercise is moderate to vigorous (37%) compared to those 18-34 (19%) and 35-49 (26%).

Exercise Activities

- Top activities among exercisers age 50+ include brisk walking (57%), flexibility exercises like stretching (30%), using cardio workout machines (like the elliptical and stair climber; 25%), weight training (24%), and calisthenics (like pushups, jumping jacks, and chin ups; 18%).

Top Exercise Activities among Adults 50+



- Walking was also the top exercise activity for exercisers age 35-49, followed by weight training (32%), calisthenics (29%), flexibility exercises (29%) and running (29%).
- Those under 35 are most likely to say they run (38%), do calisthenics (36%), weight training (36%), flexibility exercises (32%), and use cardio machines (30%).
- About 36% of adult exercisers do some activity or sport that often includes others (such as team sports, basketball, aerobics, racket sports, martial arts, dancing, etc.).

Exercising with Others

- Exercisers spend most of their time exercising alone. On average, 70% of their exercise time is spent alone. When they do exercise with others, they are about twice as likely to do it with family as with friends.
- Exercisers age 50 or older are significantly more likely to spend their time alone than those age 18-34.

**On average, what percentage of the time you spend exercising is done with other people?
(Mean percentage shown.)**

	Total 18+	Age 18-34 a	Age 35-49 b	Age 50+ c
<i>Base Unweighted</i>	818	271	212	335
Alone	70%	65%	70%	74% ^a
With family (spouse, children, other relatives)	16%	18%	15%	15%
With friends	9%	10%	11%	7%
With strangers or others I don't know very well (such as group classes)	5%	6%	5%	4%

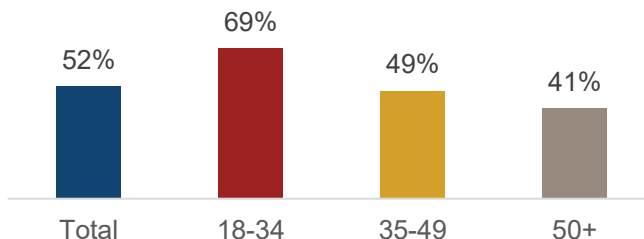
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- Despite spending so much time exercising alone, the social aspects of exercise can act as a motivator for many. Over half (52%) of adults say they have been motivated to engage in exercise because a friend or family member was doing it with them.
 - Older adults are significantly less likely to say they have been motivated to exercise because someone was doing it with them.

Benefits of Exercise

- When asked to rate the various benefits to exercise (regardless of whether they currently exercise or not), adults 50 and older are most likely to agree that improving their general health (84%) and improving their fitness (83%) are benefits for them. However, while younger adults are equally likely to agree to these two benefits, they are also much more likely than older adults to see many other benefits such as weight management, brain health, better moods, and staying connected.

Have you ever been motivated to engage in exercise because a friend or family member was doing it with you?



Percentage Who Gave Each Benefit a Top 2 Box Rating Agreeing that the Item Is/Would Be a Benefit for Them (5 pt scale)

	Total 18+	18-34 a	35-49 b	50+ c
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1025	300	259	466
Improving my general health	85%	86%	87%	84%
Improving my physical fitness	82%	80%	81%	83%
Improving the way I feel about myself	75%	82% ^c	78%	70%
Improving my overall appearance	72%	83% ^{bc}	84% ^c	64%
Helping me to reach and maintain a target weight	68%	76% ^c	72%	61%
Improving my brain health or mental sharpness	67%	71% ^c	71% ^c	62%
Improving my moods and emotions	67%	78% ^c	72% ^c	58%
Preventing or warding off diseases	66%	68%	71% ^c	61%
Staying connected to family	34%	47% ^c	37%	23%
Staying connected to friends	32%	48% ^{bc}	36% ^c	20%

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- For existing exercisers, the top **primary** reasons for exercising are also improving their general health (39%) and improving their physical fitness (19%).
 - Exercisers age 50+ are significantly more likely to say they exercise to improve their general health (50%) than younger adults (26% among 18-34 and 37% among 35-49).
- Almost none of the respondents say the social benefits of exercise are their main reason for doing so (1% cite staying connected to friends and 2% cite family as their primary benefit).

Barriers to Exercise

- The barrier to exercise cited most often by adults is willpower (48%). About four in ten also agree that feeling too tired (42%), not enjoying exercise (40%) and cost (37%) are barriers for them. Thirty-six percent say that weather makes it difficult for them as well.
- Adults age 50+ cite similar top barriers as younger adults and half of adults 50 and older say willpower is an issue for them as well (49%). Nonetheless, they are less likely to see many of the reasons offered as barriers than those 18-34.
- Two in ten adults age 50+ (and 38% of those 18-34) say not having someone to exercise with is a barrier for them, while conversely 24% of adults age 50+ say that they feel comfortable exercising around others.

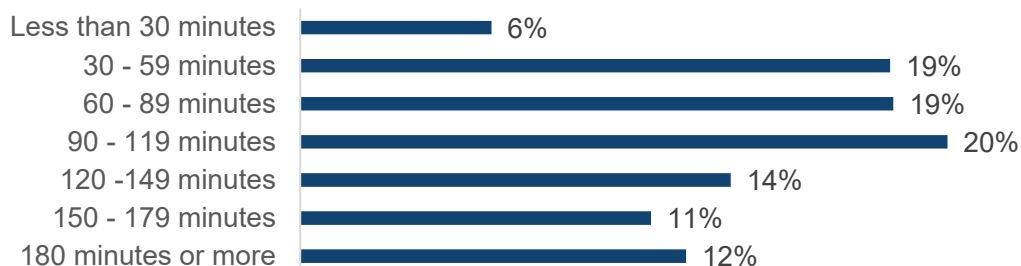
Percentage Who Say Reason is a Barrier to Exercise

	Total 18+	18-34 a	35-49 b	50+ c
<i>Unweighted base</i>	1025	300	259	466
I don't have the willpower to exercise as much as I should	48%	50%	45%	49%
I feel too tired to exercise	42%	48% ^c	44%	38%
I really do not enjoy exercise	40%	36%	38%	43%
It costs too much money to exercise (e.g., gym memberships, shoes, equipment, etc.)	37%	46% ^{bc}	33%	33%
I prefer to exercise outside but the weather makes it difficult	36%	47% ^{bc}	34%	31%
It is, or would be, physically hard for me to exercise	34%	31%	30%	37%
Exercise takes too much time	32%	43% ^{bc}	30%	26%
I feel uncomfortable exercising around others	32%	42% ^{bc}	32%	24%
I don't know which exercises benefit me, or would benefit me, and how to do them properly	28%	38% ^{bc}	27%	23%
I prefer to exercise outside but the trails, parks, or sidewalks around here make it a challenge	28%	39% ^{bc}	23%	24%
I'm afraid of getting hurt	27%	37% ^{bc}	21%	24%
I would prefer to exercise with others and I don't have anyone to exercise with me	27%	38% ^{bc}	25%	21%
I worry about my safety when I exercise	26%	35% ^{bc}	21%	23%
It is, or can be, a real hassle to shower or change my clothes to get some exercise	25%	36% ^{bc}	20%	20%
I don't feel regular exercise is necessary for me right now	22%	32% ^{bc}	18%	17%

Exercise Knowledge

- Few adults know what the recommended amount of exercise per week is. The majority of adults believe the recommended amount is less than 150 minutes per week (77%). Only 22% of adults 50+ believe it to be 150 minutes or more per week.

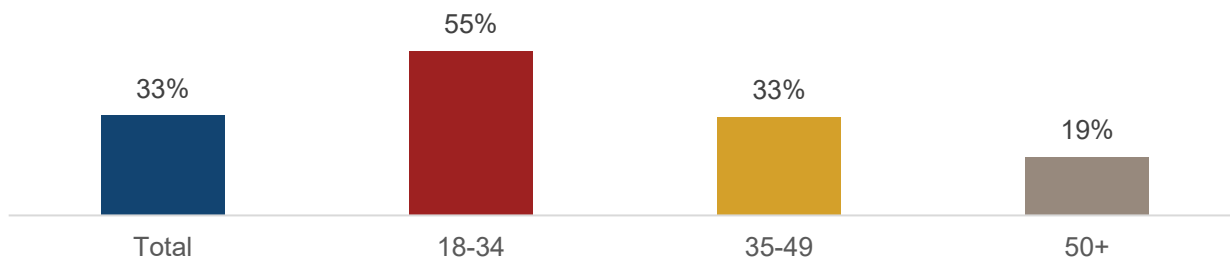
About how many minutes do you think a person your age needs to exercise to be healthy?



Fitness Challenges

- Overall, a third (33%) of adults age 18+ have participated in a fitness challenge before.
- Younger adults are the most likely to have ever participated in a fitness challenge (55% of those 18-34), while adults age 50+ are the least likely to have tried a fitness challenge (19%).
- When asked about the appeal of various benefits of a fitness challenge, prize money was the most appealing option offered—49% said it was extremely or very appealing to them (out of a 5-point scale).

Percentage ever participated in a fitness challenge



- Overall, adults age 50+ found the appeal of various challenge benefits to be less appealing than those under 50. Whether this is due to lack of appeal for challenges as a concept or simply due to lack of awareness of challenges (as most have not participated in one before) is unclear.

Appeal of Fitness Challenge Rewards (Percentage who rated it "extremely" or "very" appealing)



- The social benefits of the challenge were appealing to a little over a third of adults—38% find their family participating with them to be appealing and 37% find their friends participating with them appealing.

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