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Australian Institute of
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AIHW media releases

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A quick walk on your lunch break could significantly help Australia's physical inactivity problem

UNDER EMBARGO—until 1.00AM Wednesday 22 November 2017

A new report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) shows that small increases in our levels of physical activity could have major positive health impacts for the whole population.

The report, *Impact of physical inactivity as a risk factor for chronic conditions: Australian Burden of Disease Study*, looks at the health impact—or 'burden'—of a lack of physical activity in terms of years of healthy life lost through living with an illness or injury, or through dying prematurely.

Using data from 2011, the report found that 2.6% of the total disease burden in Australia was due to physical inactivity.

'And when physical inactivity is combined with overweight and obesity, the burden increased to 9%—equal with tobacco smoking, which is the leading risk factor for disease burden in Australia,' said AIHW spokesperson Michelle Gourley.

But the impact could be significantly reduced with just small changes to our levels of physical activity.

'We found that if everyone did an extra 15 minutes of brisk walking, 5 days each week, this would reduce disease burden due to physical inactivity in the population by about 13%,' Ms Gourley said.

This amount of activity could be achieved by taking a walk on your lunch break, or getting off the bus or train a few stops earlier.

'And if the extra activity rose to 30 minutes, the burden could be reduced by 26%'.

The benefit would be felt especially among those who are currently sedentary, as well as those aged 65 and over.

Physical inactivity was associated with 7 diseases in this study. The diseases most closely linked to physical inactivity—and which stand to gain the biggest reductions in burden from increased levels of physical activity—are diabetes (for which physical inactivity was responsible for 19% of the burden), bowel and uterine cancer (16% each), and dementia (14%).

Physical inactivity was responsible for 11% of the breast cancer and coronary heart disease burden, and 10% of the stroke burden.

Overall, the burden of physical inactivity is higher among people in lower socioeconomic groups, with people in the lowest group experiencing rates of burden at 1.7 times that of the highest group.

Earlier this year, the AIHW released analysis showing that as little as a 3 kilogram reduction in body weight could significantly reduce the burden of obesity.

Further information: Elizabeth Ingram, AIHW: Tel. (02) 6249 5048, mob. 0431 871 337

Report

- Impact of physical inactivity as a risk factor for chronic conditions: Australian Burden of Disease | 22 Nov 2017

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