Podcast 150 – The Fitness of Australians

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia, with Rob McCormack

Podcast Number 150 – The Fitness of Australians

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(This podcast is 13 minutes and 53 seconds long.)

Hi,

Australians like to think we are a sporting nation. We certainly love our sport and we love to attend sporting events. We are also proud of the achievements of our sportsmen and women. However, that does not mean that the average Australian participates regularly in sporting activities, or indeed if they are physically active or not. Being a spectator is one thing, but actually getting involved in regular physical activity is something else. In this podcast, I would like to talk about how physically active we are as Australians.

Image by Ingrid from Pixabay

The Department of Health and Aged Care in the Australian Federal Government has published a set of guidelines regarding how much regular physical exercise Australians should do, in order to have good mental and physical wellbeing. The guidelines vary by age, as you would expect. (Please see this link for full information about the guidelines (Australian Activity Guidelines)). For this podcast, I will limit my discussion to the guidelines for adults (18-64 years) and for older Australians (65 years and over).

The guidelines start off by listing the benefits of following the guidelines. These are:

- Reducing the risk of certain diseases such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease
- Maintaining healthy blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels
- Reducing the risk of some cancers
- Preventing weight gain, and helping in weight loss

- Maintaining strong muscles and bones
- Creating opportunities for socializing and meeting new people
- Developing and maintaining good mental and physical wellbeing

For Australians 65 years or older, there are the additional benefits of reducing the risk from falls, helping with concentration, improving energy levels and helping you sleep better, just to name a few.

Okay – I'm sure you would agree the benefits are worth having. Now let's look at the suggested activity levels set out in the guidelines.

For adults aged 18 to 64, they are as follows:

- First, it's important that physical activity is regular, so it is recommended that adults be physically active most days, preferably every day of the week.
- Second, every week, either
    - 2.5 to 5 hours of moderate intensity physical activity – such as a brisk walk, golf, mowing the lawn or swimming, or
    - 1.25 to 2.5 hours of vigorous intensity physical activity – such as jogging, aerobics, fast cycling, soccer or netball
- Alternatively, an equal combination of moderate and vigorous activities
- In addition, it is recommended that all adults do some muscle strengthening exercises on at least 2 days per week. Examples include doing push-ups, lifting weights or tasks that involve lifting, carrying or digging.

For older adults aged 65 years and over, it is recommended that you do at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most days of the week, preferably every day. This means, in a week, you would do preferably 3.5 hours of

moderate physical activity. If you exercised 5 days out of 7, that would be 2.5 hours of activity.

Examples of moderate intensity activities for older Australians include brisk walking, swimming, golf with no cart, aerobics or water aerobics, cycling, gardening, tennis and mopping or vacuuming the floor. As for younger adults, the guidelines recommend muscle strengthening exercise, such as weight training, lifting and carrying activities and stair climbing, amongst others. In addition, it is recommended that older Australians do some exercises to improve their flexibility. This will assist in their general movement, which can become more difficult as we get older. Flexibility activities include dancing, yoga, bowls or tai chi. Likewise, it is recommended that some basic balance exercises are completed, as they will help in preventing falls and injuries. Balance exercises include side leg raises, half squats and heel raises.

I notice that the guidelines for older Australians only talk about moderate exercise and not intensive exercise. This makes sense. When you are 65 years of age or older, intensive exercise might be more problematic, as it puts extra stress on your body. It could lead to more injuries for older people, especially since older people are more likely to have ongoing health issues and weaknesses with their health.

So how well do Australians meet these guidelines? The Australian Bureau of Statistics regularly collects information about that. Their last report before the pandemic is from 2017-18, which is probably the best one to use.

It found that around 55% of adults aged 18 to 64 met the guideline minimum requirements of 2.5 hours of moderate exercise per week, i.e. 150 minutes. If we include workplace activity, the percentage rose to 65.5%. This is higher than I expected, but it still leaves around 35% of Australian adults getting less exercise than they need, in order to be healthy.

More concerning is that only around 25% of Australian adults undertook any type of muscle strengthening training on 2 or more days per week. Overall, the report tells us that only 15% of adults in Australia met the guidelines for both moderate physical activity and muscle strengthening.

For Australians aged 65 years and older, around 26% met the guideline for moderate exercise of 30 minutes per day for 5 days per week or more. That is a worrying result, as it means many more older Australians may become unhealthy, leading to an inability to live a full and active life in their retirement. Of course, it also means that many may die earlier than they need to.

Overall, I think it is not a good picture regarding the fitness of Australians.

It is interesting to assess my own physical activity against the guidelines. As I am 71 years of age at the time of this podcast in August 2023, I will use the guidelines for older Australians. Every week, I like to do some brisk walking. My wife and I try to do an 8 kilometre walk at least 3 times a week. Each walk takes us around 80 minutes. Some weeks we do less than 3 walks but mostly it’s 3 times a week, which means 4 hours of brisk walking in that week, which meets the guidelines in terms of minutes exercising. We do enjoy our walks and luckily we have plenty of cafes in our area, so we can often stop off for a coffee at the half way point. I guess that is one of the benefits of being retired – no schedule of office meetings to worry about.

Regarding muscle strengthening, we have both recently taken up indoor rock climbing.

Silvia and Rob at the climbing gym.

This is wonderful exercise using all the muscles in your body, and is also very good for strengthening your bones.

Furthermore, it is great fun. We are surprised that more older people don't participate in this excellent physical activity. I plan to do a separate podcast in the future on indoor climbing, as I think it is worthwhile promoting as a great physical pastime for everyone. Younger people who are more competitive will find it offers great opportunities, as it is now part of the Olympics and is growing in popularity around the world. My wife and I go to our climbing gymnasium 4 times a week. Each of us spends around 25 minutes climbing on the wall in each session, meaning a total of 100 minutes per week of active exercise in the climbing gym. So, together with our regular walks, it means we can mostly achieve what the guidelines are suggesting for those aged 65 years and older. As we get older, we are aiming to meet the guidelines for our age group, in order to stay healthy in our retirement for as long as we can.

If you have a question or comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

Podcast 150 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You can take the quiz as many times as you like.

Start quiz

Vocabulary

 Play achievements = the good things you have done

 Play active when you do things (the opposite of doing nothing)

 Play activity = things people do

 Play aerobics = a type of exercise where you move to music

 Play alternatively = a different example

 Play assess = measure, see how good, bad, low or high something is

 Play attend = to go to some event

 Play balance = when you can stay in one place without falling over

 Play benefits = the good things or advantages

 Play bowls = a game where you roll a large ball along the ground

 Play brisk = fast

 Play certainly = to be sure of something

 Play cholesterol = something which is in your blood (too much of it can be bad)

 Play combination = two things put together (combined)

 Play competitive = when you like to compete against other people to test how good you are

 Play concentration = your ability to think hard about something

 Play concerning = (here) worrying

 Play developing = making or increasing

 Play falls = when you fall over on the floor or ground

 Play flexibility = the ability to move your joints freely (e.g. your back, shoulders, legs etc)

 Play gain = increase

 Play guidelines = advise which is recommended but not compulsory (necessary)

 Play half squats = to sit down half way on the spot and then stand up again

 Play heel raises = to stand on the front part of your foot with your heels off the ground

 Play inability = when you are not able to do something which you want to do

 Play involved = to be part of something or part of a process

 Play issues = problems

 Play leg raises = to raise you legs as an exercise

 Play limit = how small or large something can be

 Play maintaining = keeping at the same level

 Play moderate intensity = not too weak, not too strong

 Play mopping = to clean the floor with a special broom which is wet

 Play nation = a single country. For example, Australia, China, USA, India

 Play participates = to do something along with other people,

to be involved, to take part

 Play pastime = a hobby or activity you like to do in your spare time

 Play physically = to do with the body, about the body

 Play problematic = when something is a problem

 Play promoting = to tell others about something you believe in

 Play published = when a book or information is given or sold to the public

 Play push-ups = an exercise where you lie face down and push up your body with your arms

 Play requirements = the things that are needed

 Play schedule = (here) the list of things you must do and when you must do them

 Play spectator = a person who watches a game of sport

 Play stop off= to stop your journey for a short time, then start your journey again

 Play strengthening = to make stronger

 Play tai chi = a type of exercise where you move your body slowly

 Play type 2 diabetes = a disease

 Play vacuuming = to clean a carpet with a machine which sucks up the dust and dirt

 Play vary = change

 Play vigorous intensity = strong

 Play yoga = a type of exercise where you stretch your body