

Creating Community for a Lifetime Roadmap

Overview—Physical Activity and Nutrition

The Physical Activity and Nutrition issue area focuses on building the community’s capacity to deliver affordable, effective and culturally appropriate health and wellness programs for older adults, whether they are strong and healthy or frail and/or disabled. It addresses the need for a continuum of services, as well as the need to create a culture that supports healthy choices.

Desired Outcome

Older adults enjoy a range of support, choices and activities that ensure they remain healthy and active as long as possible.

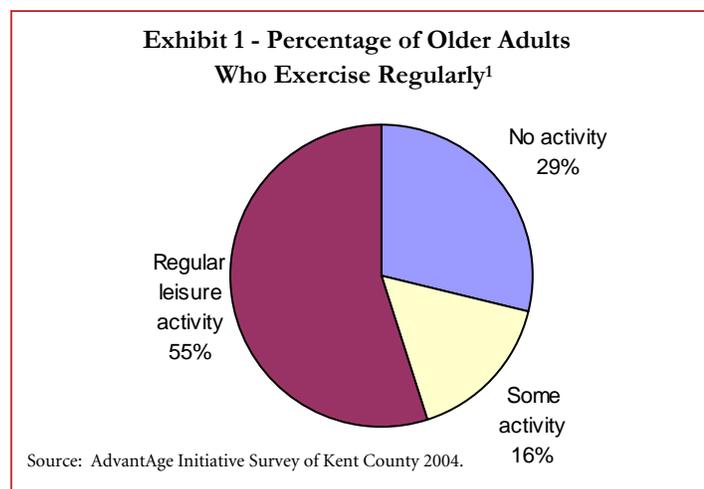
Background

A vast majority of older Kent County residents (77%) describe their health as good, very good, or excellent, slightly better than the national average. This may be partially attributable to the level of physical activity among local elders—71% engage in some leisure time physical activities. More moderate to high income elders in Kent County (78%) exercise than low income elders (61%). Nationally, only two-thirds of older adults take part in some leisure-time physical activities.

According to the National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), physical activity is one of the most important steps older adults can take to maintain physical and mental health, quality of life, and the ability to live independently. Another important factor contributing to health is good nutrition. For almost all Kent County elders, a lack of money is not a barrier to getting enough food, but it is unclear how many are eating nutritious meals. According to the CDC, only one-third of older adults in America are eating the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables a day and nearly one-third of older adults are obese, defined as at least 30 pounds above the recommended weight.

Most Kent County Elders Get Regular Exercise

The vast majority (71%) of Kent County elders engage in some form of regular physical exercise. That means, locally more than 18,000 older adults seldom or never exercise—about the same



¹“Regular leisure time activity” is defined as 1) light or moderate activity that causes light sweating or a light to moderate increase in breathing or heart rate and occurs five or more times per week for at least 30 minutes each time, and/or 2) vigorous activity that causes heavy sweating or large increases in breathing or heart rate and occurs three or more times per week for at least 20 minutes each time. People who engage in combinations of the two types of physical activities described above are included in the category “some activity.” Those who are unable to or do not engage in physical activity are included in the category “no activity.”

Physical Activity and Nutrition continued

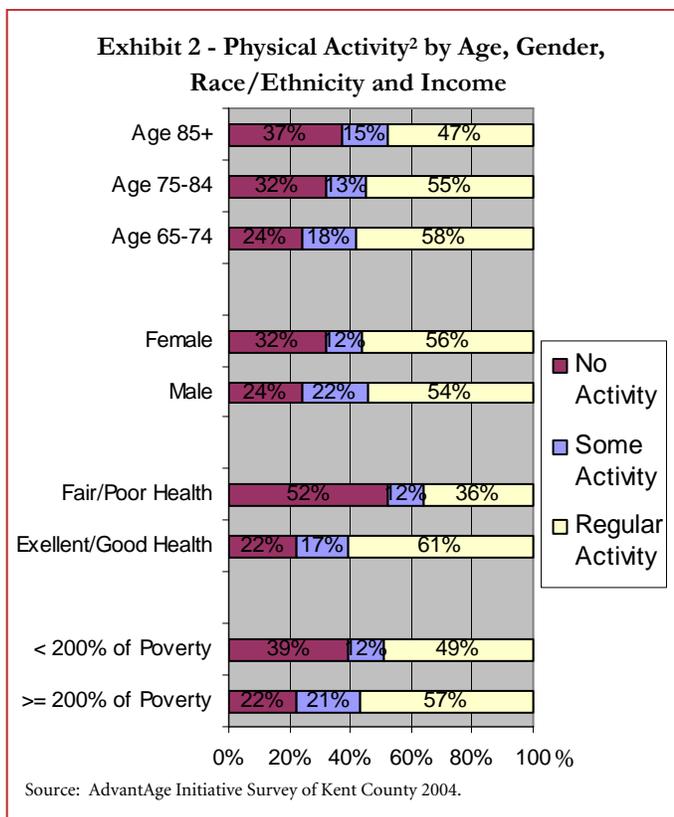
proportion (29%) found in national surveys of older Americans.

Exercise Levels Vary by Age, Gender, Health Status and Income

Although physical exercise generally decreased with age in Kent County, a majority of those 85+ (62%) engage in some form of exercise. More men (76%) tend to engage in regular exercise than women (68%), but an even larger disparity appears when we compare health status (Excellent/Good Health: 78% and Fair/Poor Health: 48%) and income levels (moderate/high income: 78%; low income: 61%).

Financial Limitations Not a Barrier to Having Enough to Eat

Two percent of Kent County elders—about 1,135 people—have had to reduce portions or skipped meals in the past year due to lack of money. In addition to financial limitations, elders face many barriers to maintaining a nutritious diet: life changes such as the loss of a spouse or a diminished sense of taste and smell can reduce appetite; and increased frailty and medical conditions may make it difficult for older adults to prepare meals, especially if they have dietary restrictions.³



² See previous page.

³ Kassner, E (2003). *Nutrition Assistance for Older Americans*. Retrieved May 23, 2006 from: <http://www.aarp.org/research/assistance/lowincome/aresearch-import-771-FS19R.html>.