

THE PRUHEALTH VITALITY INDEX

Examining the nation's health and wellbeing



November 2008

PRU HEALTH
It pays to be healthy

Foreword by Shaun Matisonn Chief Executive Officer, PruHealth

We all know that diseases of lifestyle present one of the largest public health challenges the UK has had to face. Indeed we are waking up to the possibility that today's children could be the first generation in centuries to live shorter lives than their parents.

Yet despite the size of the challenge and the amount of public discussion, not enough is known about how and where to act, and whether the activities of government, the media, employers and the public are having an impact.

This report aims to provide a regular, simple snapshot of how the nation is doing. Our hope is not only that this information will draw attention to the areas that need more focus, but it will also raise awareness of places where things are improving.

Our inaugural Index shows a very interesting picture of health in Britain today. It shows, firstly, that despite the grim statistics there are some places where we are actually doing quite well. Our knowledge about healthy lifestyles is generally good, and when it comes to smoking the majority of Britons translate that knowledge into the healthy choice. Also, although we hear a lot about unhealthy diets, we are generally conscious of the foods we choose to eat and make efforts to eat better.

However, there are other areas where we are clearly lagging. Our report confirms that far too few of us exercise regularly, that stress is a widespread concern, and that when we are well we are not as proactive as we could be in checking our vital statistics to make sure everything is in order.

At PruHealth, our belief and experience though is that with the right information, access, and motivation, it is much easier to change these habitual behaviours than is often supposed. This Index will begin to track that improvement as people become more aware of the simple things that they can do to live a healthier lifestyle and begin to see the rewards of those changes. And research has shown that the reward could be as much as 14 additional years in terms of life expectancy – surely that's something worth changing for!

KEY FINDINGS – A NATION IN DENIAL

- Sixty nine per cent of adults claim they are currently in a good state of health and 81% of adults say they know what they should and should not be doing to keep healthy.
- A significant proportion of Britons may not be as healthy as they think they are. In reality only 58% of adults live a healthy lifestyle and only 47% have a good level of fitness.
- Only a fifth of adults participate in physical activity the recommended five times per week.
- Nearly 50% of adults do not eat the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables per day.
- Two-thirds of adults consider themselves to be overweight.
- A fifth of adults currently smoke.

Vitality Scorecard

- There is significant room for improvement in a number of areas, especially when it comes to exercise and having regular check-ups.

Area	Score
Exercise	51%
Diet	66%
Smoking	71%
Stress	57%
Health knowledge	76%
Check-ups/Screenings	44%
OVERALL HEALTH OF THE NATION	61%

GENERAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Setting the scene

Hardly a day passes without a major health story hitting the media. We have never had so much information about leading healthy lifestyles. But despite falling rates of major diseases (such as heart disease and cancer) and ever longer life expectancy, people have never been so concerned about their lifestyle and its impact on their long-term health. Bombarded with advice from every possible source, how well is the healthy lifestyle message getting across? And how easy is it to implement?

The Findings

There is a clear gap between people's perceptions of what it means to be healthy and having a real understanding of the direct link between lifestyle, fitness levels, current and future health. While 69% of adults claim they are in a good state of health, with a

quarter saying it is very good, only 58% actually follow a healthy lifestyle and less than half feel they have a good level of fitness.

After lack of motivation, cost and time were identified as the main barriers to living a healthy lifestyle. Sixty per cent say they cannot afford the perceived added expense involved in health and fitness, such as the cost of 'health foods' and gym membership, while only one in 10 adults have found free ways of keeping fit and healthy. Half of Britons feel their busy day-to-day lives can get in the way; women and those with families are among those who find it most difficult to balance their busy lifestyles with taking care of their health.

Fourteen per cent of adults visit their GP for periodic check ups, meaning many people will not be able to act on any potential health problems. More reassuringly, 57% of the adult population is interested in new ways to improve their health and wellbeing, with most interest amongst women.

Regional differences

	General Health Is Good	Current Lifestyle Is Healthy	Current Level Of Fitness Is Good
All	69%	58%	47%
Scotland	75%	62%	52%
London	73%	61%	50%
South East	73%	58%	49%
South West	69%	61%	47%
West Midlands	68%	60%	46%
North West	67%	54%	46%
Yorkshire	67%	53%	40%
East Midlands	67%	60%	46%
East	66%	58%	44%
North East	66%	52%	48%
Wales	62%	59%	44%

EXERCISE – ARE WE DOING ENOUGH?

Setting the scene

There is a clear link between an individual's level of physical activity and their current and future health. Many of the leading causes of disease and disability are associated with physical inactivity, such as coronary heart disease, strokes, obesity, type II diabetes, hypertension, colorectal cancer and stress. The World Health Organisation estimates that 20% of heart disease and 10% of strokes are due to physical inactivity. Furthermore, individuals who participate in moderate physical activity could reduce their risk of premature death by 20% – 30%.

The Findings

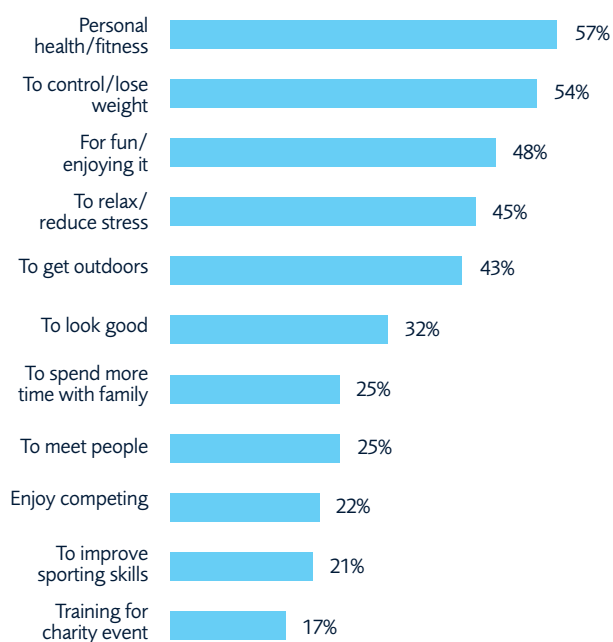
Only a fifth of us participate in moderate physical activity five times a week, with women and those under 34 least likely to achieve their weekly target. However, of those who do participate in exercise, just under two-thirds do so for the recommended minimum 30 minutes per session.

Walking is the most popular type of exercise.

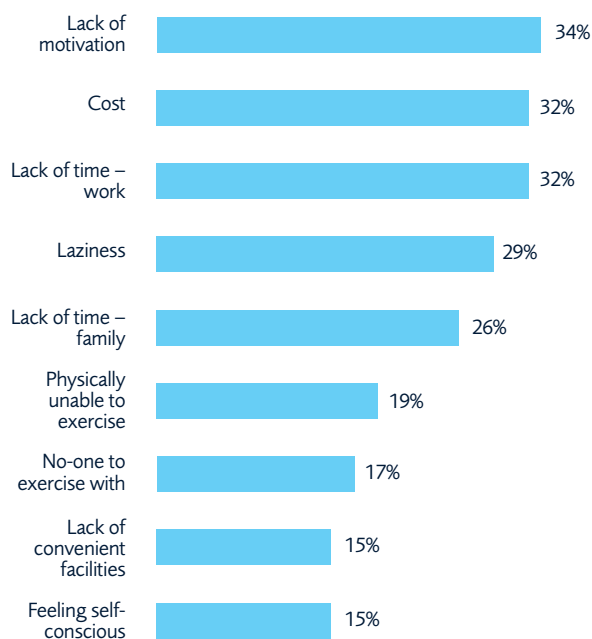
Over two-thirds of Britons go for a walk at least once a week, followed by the gym (12%), cycling (10%) and swimming (10%). It's no surprise to find the key motivators for exercise are not only health and fitness (57%) but controlling or losing weight (54%).

For those that don't participate in regular exercise, the key barriers are cost, lack of motivation and time. Around a third of adults claim that work commitments make it hard to find the time and a quarter find family commitments get in the way, in contrast with a quarter of people who use exercise in order to spend time with their family.

Motivations for taking part in sport/exercise



Barriers to taking part



NUTRITION – BALANCING DIET AND CONTROLLING WEIGHT

Setting the scene

The health benefits of having a balanced diet are clear. Not only are fruit and vegetables a plentiful source of vitamins and minerals, they are also a good source of fibre and antioxidants, and eating five portions of fruit and vegetables a day can significantly reduce the risk of certain cancers and other medical conditions.

The Government's Foresight Report recently forecast that 60% of men and 50% of women could be obese by 2050. Due to its direct link to diabetes, coronary heart disease, cancer and depression, unchecked obesity is thought to be one of the major factors influencing the current and future health of the nation.

The Findings

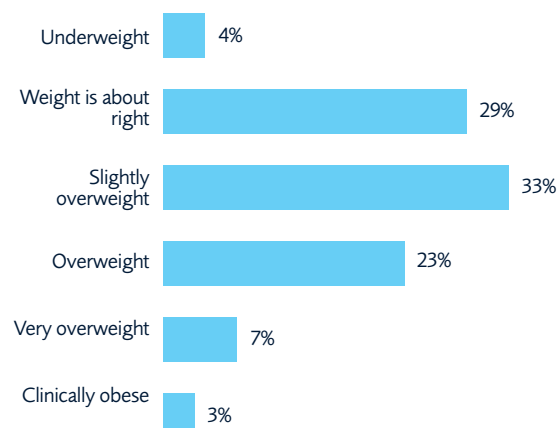
Although in recent years there has been a significant investment in raising awareness of the need to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, just under half (47%) of adults admit they don't meet this target, particularly those aged between 18 and 34. And what we can't achieve naturally, we appear to be willing to supplement, as a quarter of adults take vitamin supplements on a daily basis.

In general, we claim to try to watch what we eat; yet just over half of adults also admit to treating themselves to non-healthy foods. It appears that stress leads us to seek solace in unhealthy food with 58% of adults with high stress levels admitting they eat these types of food compared to only 40% of those with low stress levels.

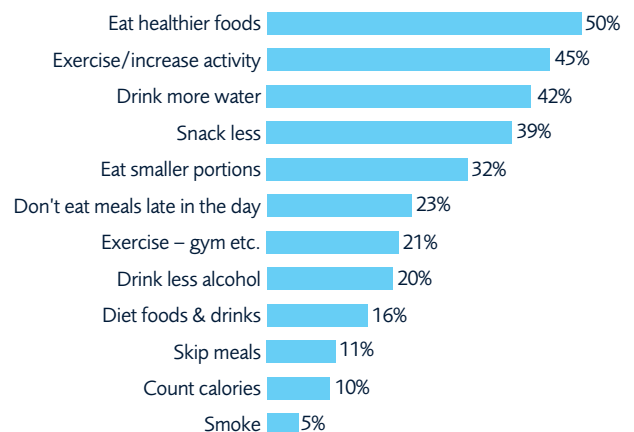
As a nation we struggle to achieve the recommended weekly amounts of physical activity, eat the recommended daily amounts of fruit and vegetables and still have an attraction to unhealthy food, so perhaps it is unsurprising that two-thirds of adults consider themselves to be overweight. Not only that, but 7% think they are very overweight, and 3% believe they are clinically obese. Consequently, an overwhelming 95% of the population agrees obesity is an important issue facing the health of the nation.

In terms of controlling weight, half of adults eat healthier foods and 45% exercise. What is alarming is that one in 10 skip meals, and 5% say they smoke in order to keep their weight under control, both of which could lead to further health problems.

Perceptions on current weight



Controlling Weight



SMOKING

Setting the scene

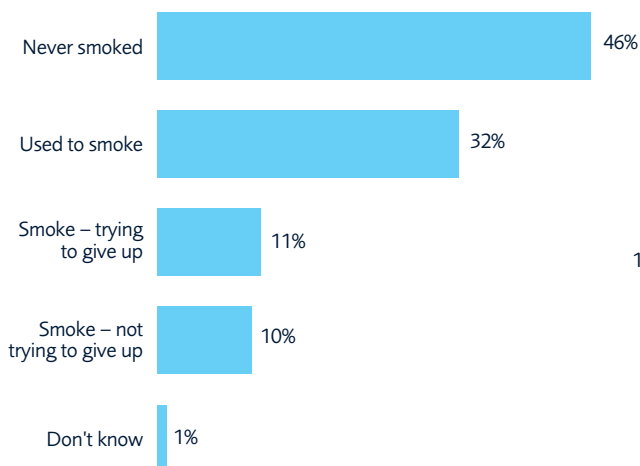
While there has been a significant reduction in the number of smokers in the UK over the past 50 years, smoking remains the principal avoidable cause of premature deaths in the UK, such as cancer, lung diseases, and cardiovascular diseases. Such is its interconnectivity with these diseases, the World Health Organisation estimates if current trends continue, there will be up to one billion deaths in the 21st century from smoking-related diseases.

The Findings

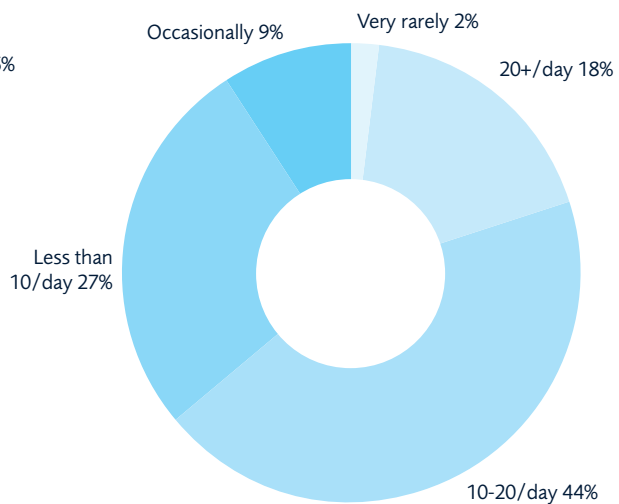
A fifth of adults currently smoke. Those most likely to smoke are 45 to 54 year olds and those living in Scotland. Alarming, nearly a fifth of smokers smoke more than 20 cigarettes a day, particularly those aged 45 to 54, who are already one of the highest risk groups for cardiovascular disease.

Despite 2007's smoking ban, social smoking remains a problem particularly among women and those aged 18 to 34. On the brighter side, a third of adults are ex-smokers and 50% of current smokers are trying to give up, particularly those aged 35 to 44.

Smoking



Smoking habits



ALCOHOL

Setting the scene

Excess alcohol consumption has a wide array of health consequences, ranging from psychological and sociological disturbances, through liver damage and disease (which are well known) to increased risks of many types of cancer, stroke and heart disease. More subtly, three to four units of alcohol per day added to a usual diet can result in an increase of 4lb in bodyweight in just four weeks.

The Findings

Over two-fifths of adults confess they drink alcohol several times a week, with just under one in 10 drinking every day. In general, men are more likely to drink alcohol several times a week than women are, and contrary to public perception, 45 to 64 year olds are more likely to than the under 25s.

The average drinker consumes seven alcoholic drinks per week: a figure which increases to 8.73 for men and 9.17 for those people who are currently living an unhealthy lifestyle. On the basis that an average pint of beer or standard glass of wine accounts for 2.8 units of alcohol, nearly a quarter (22%) of drinkers far exceed recommended guidelines. And yet just under three-quarters of drinkers believe the amount they drink is within the Government's recommended weekly limit for alcohol consumption.

However, 15% of the population claims to rarely drink, if ever, and a further one in 10 abstain totally.

STRESS

Setting the scene

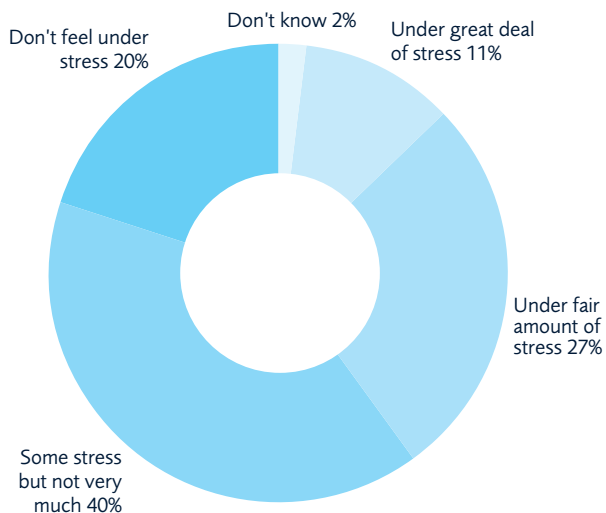
Stress is on the rise in Britain, and the Health and Safety Executive estimates that work-related stress accounts for over a third of all new incidences of ill health. Excessive or sustained periods of pressure or stress can lead to mental problems such as depression, anxiety, insomnia as well as physical problems such as high blood pressure and ulcers, and possibly even rheumatoid arthritis and asthma.

The Findings

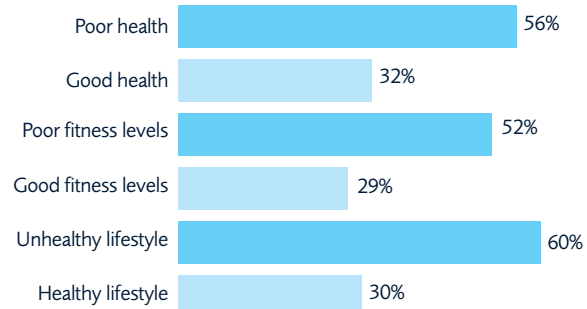
Well over three-quarters of Britons currently feel under some degree of stress, with one in 10 under a great deal of stress. People who are currently in a poor state of health, have poor fitness levels or live an unhealthy lifestyle were also found to be most likely to feel stressed than their healthier counterparts.

Given the current climate of economic uncertainty, it is perhaps unsurprising that two-fifths of adults claim their stress levels have increased over the past six months, with well over one in 10 claiming it has increased a lot.

Stress



Currently under a great deal or fair amount of stress



THE METHODOLOGY BEHIND THE PRUHEALTH VITALITY SCORECARD

To construct the Vitality Scorecard, six different areas (exercise, diet, smoking, stress, check-ups/screenings and health knowledge) were surveyed and equally weighted to create an Index. The Index is a single number (61%) that represents, in the main, the aggregate behaviour of those people surveyed, together with a smaller attitudinal component around exercise. This attitudinal component can be an important predictor in itself of the nation's future health, as intentions around exercise can quickly shape positive behaviours. Due to the difficulty in obtaining accurate questionnaire responses to some important lifestyle contributors to health – in particular behaviours surrounding sexual health, alcohol and illegal drugs – these were omitted from this Index calculation.

An equal weighting was chosen for each factor as the relative importance of each at the population level is difficult to determine in the absence of strong statistical evidence at the current time. This is not, however, meant to imply that equal attention should be given to each of these areas in health promotional activity – the ideal balance will always be a complicated function of current behaviour, readiness to change, and ease of intervention for each population segment, as well as potential health benefits available.

An improvement in the Index over time will indicate that the population is behaving in a more healthy manner, and is likely to have improved health (e.g. lower incidence of chronic disease) in the future. As such, the Index becomes a lead indicator for health trends.

Ipsos MORI conducted 3,034 interviews between 27 June and 3 July 2008. Interviews were conducted via an online panel. Quotas were set on gender, age, class, working status and region to ensure a representative sample of the over 18 GB population.

Ipsos MORI Financial Services specialises in providing research and consultancy services to all financial sectors. They work or have worked with virtually all major UK financial services providers – as well as the Government, regulators, industry bodies and media owners. Their work includes measuring the latest social and economic trends, customer satisfaction and loyalty, new product development and also the reputation of organisations and companies amongst key opinion formers.

Analysis and Conclusions

By David J. Grainger, Ph.D. (Cantab.), Senior Partner, TCP Innovations. Dr Grainger is also Principal Investigator in the Department of Medicine, Cambridge University, and a British Heart Foundation Senior Fellow.

This study suggests that the majority of the UK population have a good knowledge of what might constitute a healthy, balanced lifestyle.

Putting this knowledge into practice, however, is considerably harder. Four out of five people know what they should be doing, but only half the population even claims to be doing it. Lack of time and money are major factors, but interestingly lack of motivation is just as important.

That the difference between life and death, health and disability, does not motivate more radical changes in lifestyle only serves to illustrate the challenge of change. Poor diet, lack of exercise, smoking and drinking alcohol are all habits, and habits are hard to change. Encouragingly, more than half the population (hopefully the half that are not already leading healthy lifestyles) have expressed a desire to improve these aspects of their lifestyle over the next six months.

Perhaps, to an extent, this lack of motivation stems from images of a healthy lifestyle – without tobacco and alcohol, with a low fat diet rich in fruit and vegetables – being so far removed from their current lifestyle that, for at least a fraction of the population, they are discouraged from making even moderate changes as they feel it won't be enough to improve their overall health.

But wherever we can, we should try and avoid smoking, monitor alcohol consumption, exercise as frequently as we can and eat a sensible, balanced diet avoiding excesses. Rewarding what we can achieve, rather than worrying about what we cannot, will improve mental as well as physical wellbeing.

Let us not forget that the current survey has been carried out against a backdrop of falling rates of major diseases, such as heart disease and cancer, the likes of which have never been seen before. Since the mid-1980's the rate of premature heart attack (before the age of 75) have fallen by two-fold, equivalent to 20,000 lives a year saved.

Many factors have contributed. Improved medical care, with better drugs, has undoubtedly played its part. But drugs only work if they are given to the right people, and a regular health check plays an important part of identifying diseases such as diabetes and hypertension at an early stage so they can be treated. Today, only 14% of people have such a check-up while they feel healthy, but the Government has recognized the importance of increasing this figure if we are to continue to see the kind of reductions in death and ill health we have enjoyed over the last 20 years.

Falling rates of smoking, and other lifestyle improvements, have certainly also played their part. Just over one in five individuals now smokes tobacco (fewer than half the number of smokers compared to three decades earlier), and, according to this report, half of those would like to stop. If they all managed to do so tomorrow, we estimate that nearly a million years of lost life would be saved from heart disease alone.

This report makes clear that people listen, and understand, the public health message. Lifestyles are improving, disease rates are falling. But there is plenty more still to do. More than 60% of respondents felt they were over-weight, 21% still smoke. Small changes are hard won, but the prize is surely worth the effort.

