

A Change from Active to Passive Leisure Time Activities May Be Contributing to the Obesity Epidemic

A recent Harris Interactive survey throws fresh light on the causes of the nation's "obesity epidemic." Increasingly, the nation's favorite pastimes require little or no exercise. And the proportions of the public whose favorite activities involve exercise have been decreasing.

Since 1995, Harris Interactive has asked a nationwide cross section of adults to name their two or three favorite leisure time activities. Eight years ago, 38% of all the replies involved activities that required exercise including fishing, gardening, playing sports, swimming, walking, hunting, bicycling, hiking, running or dancing. Now only 29% of the replies involve exercise. A higher proportion of our favorite activities can now be accomplished while sitting.

These are the results of a Harris Interactive nationwide telephone survey of 1,017 adults conducted between October 14 and 19, 2003.

Table 1
Proportion Of Favorite Pastimes Involving Exercise

	1995	2003
Favorite Activities	%	%
Involve exercise*	38	29
Involve little or no exercise	62	71

*Includes fishing, gardening, playing team sports, swimming, golf, walking, exercise, hunting, bicycling, hiking, camping, running, bowling, dancing, tennis, horseback riding, skiing or housework/yard work.

Source: Harris Interactive, November 2003

Some examples of favorite pastimes that have declined that do require some exercise (if not necessarily a great deal) are gardening (down from 9% to 6%), team sports (from 9% to 6%), walking (from 8% to 4%), swimming (from 7% to 2%), bicycling (from 4% to 2%), running (from 2% to 1%), and bowling (from 4% to 1%).

♦ EDITORS ♦

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What's Ahead in Health Care News?

In 2004, Harris Interactive and IMS Health will launch a global physician poll that provides insights on the perspectives and experiences of physicians in the U.S., U.K., France, Germany, Italy and Spain. Look for results in upcoming issues of the Harris Interactive *Health Care News*.

A 20-Year Trend

Harris Interactive has been tracking the public's weight annually for 20 years.

By our measures, in 1983, 58% of all adults over 25 were overweight. That number – using the identical measures – had risen to 80% last December. And the proportion of adults over 25 who were 20% or more over their recommended weight, a reasonable definition of obesity, had increased from 15% to 33% over the last 20 years.

Explaining Why

There are, of course, several different causes of the obesity epidemic. The most simple explanation is that we consume more and more calories and exercise much too little. But *why* has our behavior changed, and *why* does it continue to change?

One reason why we eat and drink more calories is that we are bombarded by advertising in which glamorous, slim, happy, elegant people make us feel we can be more like them if we consume more of the products advertised. Andrew Prentice of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medical was quoted recently observing that “food is cheaper now by a long way, more abundantly available, more highly refined, more delicious and more pressingly sold to us by very clever advertising companies and techniques.”

Not only do we eat larger portions at our regular meals, we eat and drink many more calories *between* meals. We do this at movie theaters, with their giant-sized buckets of popcorn and large sodas, and at sporting events. We snack at shopping malls. We munch and drink while we watch television.

This new Harris Interactive survey shows that, increasingly, we prefer sedentary leisure time activities where we do not have to break a sweat.

Financial Incentives to Lose Weight

Another recent Harris Interactive survey conducted for *The Wall Street Journal Online* found that most people oppose the use of financial incentives to discourage obesity. Although a majority of all adults favor smokers paying higher health care costs than non-smokers, and a majority favor penalizing people who do not wear seat belts, a clear 52% to 27% majority opposes having those who are overweight paying higher premiums, co-payments or deductibles than those who are not overweight – possibly because many people are now overweight themselves, or because obesity is thought to be “not their fault.”

These are the results of a nationwide online survey of 2,231 adults conducted by Harris Interactive between October 30 and November 3, 2003.

Table 2
Financial Incentives To Encourage Healthier Life Styles

“Would you favor or oppose different levels of health insurance premiums, co-payments or deductibles for...?”

Base: All Adults

	All Adults
	%
Smokers vs. non-smokers	
Favor	58
Oppose	31
Not sure	12
Overweight vs. within their recommended weight	
Favor	27
Oppose	52
Not sure	21
Do not wear seat belts vs. wear seat belts	
Favor	53
Oppose	33
Not sure	14
Exercise regularly vs. who do not exercise regularly	
Favor	27
Oppose	52
Not sure	21

Source: Survey conducted by Harris Interactive for The Wall Street Journal Online’s Health Industry Edition, November 2003

Methodology for Table 1

The Harris Poll® was conducted by telephone within the United States between October 14 and 19, 2003 among a nationwide cross section of 1,017 adults (ages 18+). Figures for age, sex, race, education, number of adults and number of voice/telephone lines in the household were weighted where necessary to align them with their actual proportions in the population. In theory, with a probability sample of this size, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of ± 3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. They include refusals to be interviewed (non-response), question wording and question order, interviewer bias, weighting by demographic control data and screening (e.g., for likely voters). It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

Methodology for Table 2

This survey was conducted online by Harris Interactive for The Wall Street Journal Online's Health Industry Edition within the United States between October 30 and November 3, 2003 among a nationwide cross section of 2,231 people 18 years and older. Figures for age, sex, race, education, income and number of adults were weighted where necessary to align with population proportions. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

In theory, with a probability sample of this size, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of ± 3.3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. They include refusals to be interviewed (non-response), question wording and question order, interviewer bias, weighting by demographic control data and screening (e.g., for likely voters). It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. This online sample was not a probability sample.

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About Harris Interactive®

Harris Interactive (www.harrisinteractive.com) is a worldwide market research and consulting firm best known for *The Harris Poll*®, and for pioneering the Internet method to conduct scientifically accurate market research. Headquartered in Rochester, New York, U.S.A., Harris Interactive combines proprietary methodologies and technology with expertise in predictive, custom and strategic research. The Company conducts international research through wholly owned subsidiaries—London-based **HI Europe** (www.hieurope.com) and Tokyo-based **Harris Interactive Japan**—as well as through the Harris Interactive Global Network of local market- and opinion-research firms, and various U.S. offices. EOE M/F/D/V

To become a member of the Harris Poll OnlineSM and be invited to participate in future online surveys, visit www.harrispollonline.com.

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