

# Physical inactivity linked to higher healthcare costs in American adults

Physical Activity Alliance

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A new study published in the *American Journal of Health Promotion* finds that inadequate leisure-time aerobic physical activity accounts for \$192 billion in annual healthcare costs among U.S. adults-12.6% of total national health care spending.

Researchers analyzed data from more than 76,000 adults between 2012 and 2019. The findings are stark:

- 52.4% of adults met aerobic activity guidelines
- 20.4% were insufficiently active
- 27.3% were completely inactive
- The average adult incurred \$6,566 in annual healthcare costs

Compared to active adults:

- Insufficiently active adults incurred \$1,355 more than active adults in annual health care costs.
- Completely inactive adults incurred \$2,025 more per year.

"Aerobic physical activity is an investment in health-it strengthens the heart, reduces chronic disease burdens, and empowers us to live with energy and freedom," said one of the study's co-authors, Dr. Adam Chen, of the University of Georgia's College of Public Health.

Despite modest national gains in physical activity, health care costs continue to rise, largely driven by preventable chronic conditions. The consequences are being felt across sectors.

"These findings provide further economic reasons for health systems, payers, and clinicians to integrate physical activity assessment, prescription, and referral into health care delivery," said co-author Laurie Whitsel, PhD, National Vice President of Policy Research at the American Heart Association and Senior Advisor to the national Physical Activity Alliance. "We need to inspire and

support people to make physical activity a regular part of their day."

Co-author Jennifer Matjasko, PhD, of the CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, underscored the power of a simple solution hiding in plain sight. "Moving more throughout the day can help improve health and reduce health care costs," she said. "Every step counts toward a healthier future."

The Physical Activity Alliance, the nation's largest coalition advancing physical activity policy and systems change, is calling for immediate cross-sector action:

- Make physical activity a standard of care in health care. It must be assessed, tracked, and, where necessary, prescribed-just as blood pressure or cholesterol are assessed and tracked, and addressed with prescriptions when needed.
- Redesign workplaces to make movement the norm. Sedentary work culture is accelerating chronic disease.
- Transform communities through policies that make physical activity safe, easy, and unavoidable-where people live, learn, work, and play.

“ We're spending nearly one out of every eight health care dollars on something we can prevent. We need to view physical activity as an essential health care solution to inspire people to move across their day in recreation, to and from work, in their jobs, at home and in schools.”

*Michael Stack, ACSM-EP, President of the Physical Activity Alliance*

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**Source:**

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**Journal reference:**

Matjasko, J. L., *et al.* (2025). Inadequate Aerobic Physical Activity and Healthcare Expenditures in the United States: An Updated Cost Estimate. *American Journal of Health Promotion*. doi.org/10.1177/08901171251357128.