

SEDENTARY LIFESTYLE: A GLOBAL PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM

- Sedentary lifestyle is a major underlying cause of death, disease, and disability. Approximately 2 million deaths every year are attributable to physical inactivity; and preliminary findings from a WHO study on risk factors suggest that sedentary lifestyle is one of the ten leading causes of death and disability in the world. Physical inactivity increases all causes mortality, doubles the risk of cardiovascular disease, type II diabetes, and obesity. It also increases the risks of colon and breast cancer, high blood pressure, lipid disorders, osteoporosis, depression and anxiety.
- Levels of inactivity are high in virtually all developed and developing countries. In developed countries more than half of adults are insufficiently active. In the rapidly growing large cities of the developing world, physical inactivity is an even greater problem. Crowding, poverty, crime, traffic, low air quality, and a lack of parks, sports and recreation facilities, and sidewalks make physical activity a difficult choice. For example, in São Paulo, approximately 70 % of the population is inactive.
- Even in rural areas of developing countries sedentary pastimes, such as watching television, are increasingly popular. Inevitably, the results are increased levels of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. In the entire world, with the exception of sub-Saharan Africa, chronic diseases are now the leading causes of death. Unhealthy diets, caloric excess, inactivity, obesity and associated chronic diseases are the greatest public health problem in most countries in the world.
- Data gathered on health surveys from around the world is remarkably consistent. The proportion of adults who are sedentary or nearly so ranges from 60 to 85 %.
- WHO is currently assessing the global burden of disease from 22 health risk factors, including physical inactivity. The results of this research will be published in the World Health Report 2002. It is clear that physical inactivity is a major public health problem that effects huge numbers of people in all regions of the world. Effective public health measures are urgently needed to promote physical activity and improve public health around the world.

