

Reporting exercise minutes as part of routine check-up

By ACSH Staff — January 8, 2013

The next time you go for your routine check-up, you may be asked a new question: How many minutes per week are you active or getting exercise?

According to a recent [national survey](#) [1], only a third of Americans are being asked by their doctors about physical activity habits, but Kaiser Permanente, one of the nation's largest nonprofit health insurance plans, wants to change that. They started with a push a few years ago to have doctors in their Southern California network add this question to a routine check of vital signs. This number is then posted with the other vitals at the top of the patient's medical chart.

Dr. Robery Sallis, a Kaiser family doctor, says that Kaiser doctors generally prescribe exercise first, instead of medication, and for many patients who follow through that's often all it takes. He also points out that many patients are not aware that physical inactivity is riskier than high blood pressure, obesity and other risks people know they should avoid. Dr. William Dietz, an obesity expert who retired last year from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, believes that naming exercise as a vital sign up there with blood pressure, pulse and temperature, will change this fact and elevate its importance.

Ultimately, the next step is to figure out how to get people to be more active, and adding this simple question to a check-up may be a good start. It could also have a big effect in reducing medical costs, according to Dr. Dietz, which is something that few can argue with.

ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan had this perspective: Our own Department of Education in New York should take note of this vital issue, since they have shown a proclivity toward saving budget dollars by cutting out physical education. Reversing this trend would have a much more effective impact on obesity rates than nonsense policies, such as banning large sodas.

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[1] http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-204_162-57562535/exercise-minutes-should-be-included-on-medical-charts-say-doctors/