
Hike Ontario Fact Sheet

The Benefits of Walking and the Importance of Trails in Ontario

The following facts and figures have been gathered from a variety of studies and surveys. Sources are listed.

Please let us know of any other interesting reports of which you are aware.

Physical Activity of Ontario Population

- Regular physical activity is highest in youths and decreases with age.
- 61% of adults aged 18 and older were considered insufficiently active for optimal health benefits in 2000, compared with 79% in 1981. More women (67%) than men (54%) are inactive.

Physical Activity of Canadians

Looking at Canada's population as a whole and focussing on the 20 to 64 age group, 41% of women and 42% of men were physically active in 2000/01.

Canadian Community Health Survey: A first look 2000/01

- More women (67%) than men (54%) are in active.
- Over half of children and youth aged 5-17 are not active enough for optimal growth and development.
- Girls are less active than boys: 38% of girls and 48% of boys are considered active enough for optimal health benefits.
- Those who are active engage in the amount of physical activity that is required for cardiovascular health benefits. Those moderately active may experience some health benefits from the amount of physical activity they do but little cardiovascular benefits.

2000 Physical Activity Monitor, conducted by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, www.cflri.ca

The good news is physical activity does not have to be very hard to provide health benefits. For example, walking - one of Canada's most enjoyed forms of physical activity - is fun and can help people feel great! Brisk walking for 30 minutes, 4 to 7 days of the week, will provide many health benefits.

These health benefits include reducing the risk of morbidity and mortality from chronic diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, osteoporosis, non-insulin-dependent diabetes, and certain cancers.

Regular walking has also been associated with improved mental health, including reduced anxiety, tension and depression and improved self-esteem.

Regular walkers will experience increased energy level and stamina, better sleep and lower stress levels. Improved muscle tone in the shin, calves and thighs will also be noticed.

Durham Lives! - A committee led by the public health department in the Regional Municipality of Durham, Ontario. Durham Lives promotes physical activity, healthy eating and a smoke-free community to reduce heart disease and cancer.

The following is from a report on a walking initiative launched in Sonning Common, England in 1995-1996. It was provided by Peter Ashcroft, Walking for Health Co-ordinator, Countryside Agency, England.

Health Walks: Reported health benefits

- About 10% reported decreased levels of illness
- About 25% reported reduced their stress levels
- About 60% reported higher stamina levels
- About 55% reported higher energy levels.

The evaluation found over three-quarters of the participants reported positive impacts of Health Walks and significant health benefits.

Walking ranked first (82%) amongst physical activities of Canadians. (2000 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI)

85% of Canadians walk for leisure and recreational reasons. 82% of Canadians confirmed that they would ideally like to walk more often than they currently do. Trails can provide Canadians of all ages with this opportunity. (CFLRI 1995/Enviro-nics 1998, as reported in Trail Monitor, published by Go for Green)

REASONS FOR WALKING

Top five reasons for walking as a mode of transportation in Canada are:

- exercise/health (62%)
 - pleasure (30%)
 - practicality/convenience (24%)
 - environmental concern (10%)
 - saving money (9%)
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BARRIERS TO WALKING

The principal barriers to walking as a mode of transportation reported by Canadians are:

- distance (47%)
 - time (19%)
 - weather (18%)
 - inconvenience (11%)
 - health/disability (11%)
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PARTICIPATION

Two in three (64%) of all Canadians live within a 30 minute walk (2.5 km) of a routine destination like work, leisure, shopping, friends/family or school. The data show that living within a thirty minute walk of a destination greatly increases the likelihood of participation. (Summary Report, 1998 National Survey on Active Transportation, conducted by Enviro-nics International on behalf of Go for Green)

Trails May Entice People to Exercise More Frequently

This is the conclusion of a study undertaken by St. Louis University School of Public Health in Missouri. The study, titled "Promoting Physical Activity in Rural Communities: Walking Trail Access, Use and Effects" was conducted in 1999. Researchers found that 39% of people who had access to trails used them and walked more because of this access.

Greenways located close to ones home are accessible to all income groups. Trails that can be used easily as a route to the corner store, or to commute to work or school, will rapidly become part of community life. (Royal Commission on the Future of Toronto's Waterfront 1992, as reported in Trail Monitor, published by Go for Green)

An important by-product of trails is improved self-image and social relationships, reduced crime, a livelier community atmosphere and a lifestyle which encourages young people to find their entertainment in healthier and more wholesome ways. (Active Living - Go for Green, 1996, as reported in Trail Monitor, published by Go for Green)

Trails help build partnerships among private companies, landowners, neighbouring municipalities, local government, and advocacy groups. When residents are encouraged to be involved in a community project, like a trail project, they feel more connected to the community. (Warren 1998, as reported in Trail Monitor, published by Go for Green)

Who Hikes

In a survey of hikers, 48% were male, 52% female. 79% were under 50 years of age and of this number 34.6% were 29 or younger while 44.4% were between the ages of 30 and 49. Nearly 20% of the total number of respondents were between the ages of 50 and 69.

Trail Popularity

The most popular type of trails, in order of use, were:

- long distance hiking trails (38.4% of trails mentioned) (e.g. Bruce, Ganaraska)
- local/municipal trails (28%)
- provincial & national parks (18.1%)
- conservation areas (7.7%)
- rail trails (1.5%)

Clubs/Associations

Respondents were asked about memberships held in clubs and associations.

- 64.8% not members of club or association
- 18.1% member of trail association
- 10% member of sport association
- 2.3% member of environmental association
- less than 1% member of recreational outing club
- 4.1% other membership

Other Findings

- Hikers are generally well educated; the majority hold a college diploma or higher
- Hikers are middle to upper class in terms of income
- Fall is the most popular season for hiking, followed by Spring, Summer and Winter
- Most hikers hike with friends and family
- Most hikers stay within 50 km of their community on a typical day outing

The Ontario Hikers and Trail Users Survey, Hike Ontario, 1998

Research conducted along the 800 km Bruce Trail in 1994-1996 revealed the trail received 410,060 user visits over a 12-month period. Trail users' expenditures generated \$26,084,817 direct economic impact, with a gross economic spin-off of \$60,255,926 annually. These expenditures supported 1,138 full-time equivalent jobs in Ontario.

30 Years in the Making: A Comprehensive Economic Impact and User Study of the Bruce Trail, 1997, Schutt