

Physical Activity, Anthropometry and Perception of Body Weight

Physical activity

The physical demands associated with daily activity have decreased considerably during the 20th century, particularly in industrialized countries, and Aboriginal populations living in these regions have not been spared from this phenomenon. Thus, as is the case for the rest of the population, leisure time physical activity has become an important avenue for maintaining a desirable level of physical activity.

The vast majority of the Nunavik population, especially women, is sedentary during their free time, and this is true regardless of age for both genders (15-17 years: 59% and 18 years and over: 69%). Less than one person in seven (14%) among those aged 15 to 17 years, and one out of five (18%) among people aged 18 years and over, achieve the recommended level of physical activity through leisure time physical activity. This situation, in large part associated with the significant cultural and climatic differences between this population and that living further south, should be corrected because work and domestic activities are not (and will not be) for most, a sufficient source of physical activity. Moreover, motorized transportation (snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles) has largely replaced walking. For a large proportion of these people, leisure time physical activity has become the main avenue for attaining a sufficient level of physical activity throughout their lifetime. For others, the return to walking as a mode of transportation may become an effective avenue to achieving the same results.

Anthropometry and perception of body weight

Obesity is a growing health threat for every country in the world. It is associated with many illnesses including type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and cardiovascular disease. Among the adult population of Nunavik, the prevalence of obesity (BMI ≥ 30) increased by 49% since 1992 and now affects close to three people in ten (28%). A higher level of obesity is observed among women, as well as among those aged 50 to 74. However, the increase in excess weight between 1992 and 2004 was much more significant among men and young adults.

Abdominal obesity which is associated with an increased risk of the above-mentioned health problems, also increased since 1992, from 23% to 37%. Women are much more likely to have an at-risk waist circumference, as are older adults when compared to younger ones. However, once again, between 1992 and 2004 we see the greatest increases among men and among young adults.

However, while the majority (58%) of the adult population of Nunavik have a weight surplus (BMI ≥ 25), the survey revealed that only 28% of them perceived themselves as such. Specifically, among the Inuit who are overweight or obese, more than half (54%) consider themselves to be of normal weight.

>>>

The significant increase in body and abdominal obesity places the population of Nunavik at greater risk for chronic illness, which justifies the implementation of strategies to control excess weight gain. The rapid increase among men and young adults since 1992 should be given particular attention when developing programs to promote healthy lifestyles. The perception the Inuit have of their weight should also be taken into account to ensure the effectiveness of these programs.

AUTHORS

- > Bertrand Nolin
Unité Connaissance-surveillance
Direction Planification, recherche et innovation
Institut national de santé publique du Québec
- > Patricia Lamontagne
Unité Connaissance-surveillance
Direction Planification, recherche et innovation
Institut national de santé publique du Québec
- > Angélo Tremblay
Division kinésiologie
Département de médecine sociale et préventive
Université Laval

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

- > Louis Rochette
Unité Connaissance-surveillance
Direction Planification, recherche et innovation
Institut national de santé publique du Québec

The complete text of this document is available on the INSPQ's Web site at www.inspq.gc.ca