



Sport Participation in Canada

Chapter 13

13.0 Benefits of Sport

To quote the Honourable Denis Coderre, Secretary of State (Amateur Sport):

“Sport is at the heart of Canadian life. It’s an activity that has benefits for each and every Canadian, for our communities and for our country. Sport puts front and centre the qualities we value as Canadians - fairness, team spirit, hard work, dedication and commitment. And our hard-working, dedicated and committed high-performance athletes are unquestionably role models for our children. Sport promotes physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health and well-being. Sport develops character and teaches the rewards of discipline and perseverance. It is also a way for Canadians to get to know each other. “

People today are aware that sport affords many benefits to our overall health and personal lives. Researchers have long recognized that participation in sport makes a positive contribution to fitness, health and well-being. But sport contributes to more than personal fitness. Researchers believe that sport has wide-reaching benefits including the development of social skills, self-esteem, stress management and leadership skills, to name a few.

In order to assess the perceived benefits of sport among adult Canadians, a new question was added to the 1998 cycle of the GSS Sport Supplement. Specifically, Canadians were asked to rank the degree to which sport is important in providing them with the following benefits: physical health and fitness, family activities, new friends/ acquaintances and relaxation.

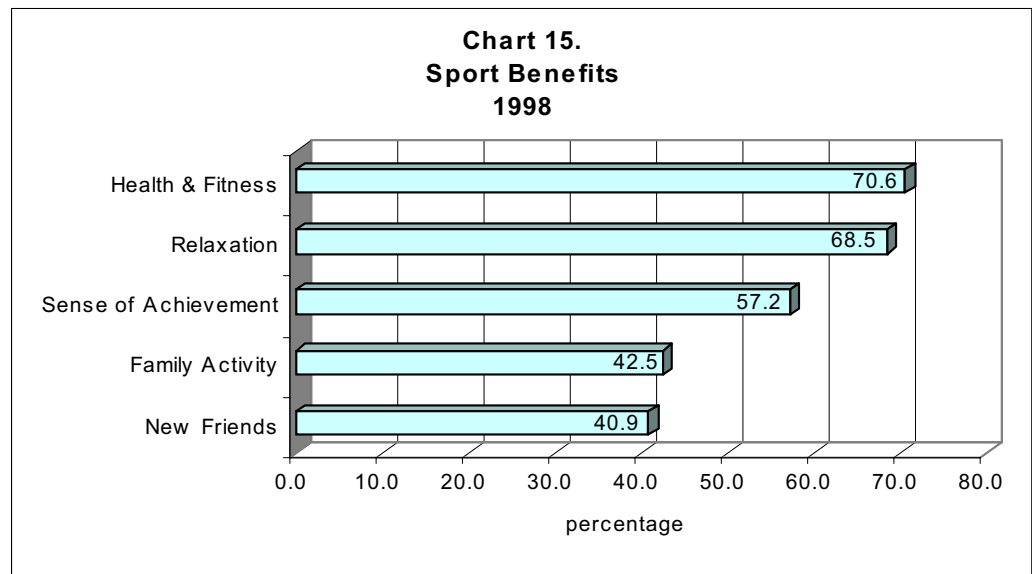
13.1 ‘Health and Fitness’ and ‘Relaxation’ Ranked as Top Benefits

Active Canadians ranked ‘health and fitness’ and ‘relaxation’ as the most important benefits of sport.

A sense of achievement’ was rated as a very important benefit by nearly 6 in 10 adult Canadians.

In general, Canadians hold positive attitudes towards the benefits of sport. Active Canadians ¹ ranked health and fitness (71%) and relaxation (69%) as the most important benefits of sport. A sense of achievement was rated as a very important benefit by nearly 6 in 10 (57%) adult Canadians. Both family activity (43%) and making new friends/acquaintances (41%) ranked last in relative importance. This pattern holds true for both men and women with one exception. A higher proportion of women (49%) than men (38%) ranked family activity as a very important benefit of sport.

¹ Active Canadians refers to the total number of Canadians, 15 years and older, having reported participating in sport on a regular basis over the past 12 months.



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1998

13.2 Sport Benefits Differ across Age Categories

Notable differences were observed in the relative importance that Canadians assigned to the benefits of sport when we sort the population by age group. Participating in sport seems to take on a different function as we age. Young adults between 15-18 and 19-24 identified 'health and fitness' as the most important benefit of sport, while for Canadians aged 25 and older, 'relaxation' tied with 'health and fitness'.

A 'sense of achievement' seems to be a very important benefit among young Canadians aged 15-18 where it ranks second after 'health and fitness'. For the older generations, a sense of achievement ranked third.

'New friends/acquaintances' and 'family activity' ranked last amongst the various benefits of sport by all ages. Interestingly, the 25-34 and 35-54 age groups ranked 'family activity' ahead of 'new friends' suggesting that sport is used as a form of family entertainment, something to be enjoyed as a family during the child-rearing years.

These overall pattern holds, for the most part, for both men and women with one exception. Women of all ages tend to attribute a higher level of importance to sport as a 'family activity' than did men.

Table 15.

Benefits of Participating in Sport by Age group and Sex, Canada, 1998

Both Sexes

	Active pop*	Very Important		Somewhat Important		Not Important		
		000s	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%
Physical health and fitness								
15-18	1,121	815	72.7	288	25.7	x	x	
19-24	1,235	933	75.5	277	22.4	x	x	
25-34	1,781	1,193	67.0	518	29.1	70	3.9	
35-54	2,937	2,040	69.5	764	26.0	123	4.2	
55 +	1,234	884	71.6	299	24.2	51	4.1	
total	8,308	5,865	70.6	2,146	25.8	287	3.5	
Family Activities								
15-18	1,121	312	27.8	503	44.9	307	27.4	
19-24	1,235	317	25.7	463	37.5	456	36.9	
25-34	1,781	789	44.3	525	29.5	467	26.2	
35-54	2,937	1,568	53.4	875	29.8	485	16.5	
55 +	1,234	545	44.2	377	30.6	312	25.3	
total	8,308	3,531	42.5	2,743	33.0	2,027	24.4	
New Friends & Acquaintances								
15-18	1,121	556	49.6	483	43.1	82	7.3	
19-24	1,235	522	42.3	477	38.6	237	19.2	
25-34	1,781	643	36.1	833	46.8	305	17.1	
35-54	2,937	1,076	36.6	1,247	42.5	605	20.6	
55 +	1,234	598	48.5	442	35.8	194	15.7	
total	8,308	3,395	40.9	3,482	41.9	1,423	17.1	
Relaxation								
15-18	1,121	633	56.5	377	33.6	112	10.0	
19-24	1,235	797	64.5	379	30.7	59	4.8	
25-34	1,781	1,235	69.3	469	26.3	78	4.4	
35-54	2,937	2,131	72.6	676	23.0	120	4.1	
55 +	1,234	892	72.3	308	25.0	x	x	
total	8,308	5,688	68.5	2,209	26.6	402	4.8	
Sense of Achievement								
15-18	1,121	760	67.8	263	23.5	98	8.7	
19-24	1,235	764	61.9	371	30.0	100	8.1	
25-34	1,781	978	54.9	627	35.2	176	9.9	
35-54	2,937	1,585	54.0	1,042	35.5	302	10.3	
55 +	1,234	665	53.9	409	33.1	160	13.0	
total	8,308	4,752	57.2	2,712	32.6	836	10.1	

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Table 15 (con't)

Male								
	Active pop*	Very Important		Somewhat Important		Not Important		
		000s	%	000s	%	000s	%	
Physical health and fitness								
15-18	688	502	73.0	177	25.7	x	x	
19-24	760	616	81.1	126	16.6	x	x	
25-34	1,121	786	70.1	284	25.3	51	4.5	
35-54	1,852	1,288	69.5	480	25.9	83	4.5	
55 +	719	526	73.2	172	23.9	x	x	
total	5,140	3,718	72.3	1,239	24.1	181	3.5	
Family Activities								
15-18	688	163	23.7	338	49.1	187	27.2	
19-24	760	144	18.9	276	36.3	340	44.7	
25-34	1,121	432	38.5	331	29.5	357	31.8	
35-54	1,852	936	50.5	557	30.1	357	19.3	
55 +	719	295	41.0	232	32.3	191	26.6	
total	5,140	1,970	38.3	1,734	33.7	1,432	27.9	
New Friends & Acquaintances								
15-18	688	353	51.3	273	39.7	62	9.0	
19-24	760	364	47.9	275	36.2	121	15.9	
25-34	1,121	392	35.0	559	49.9	170	15.2	
35-54	1,852	681	36.8	790	42.7	379	20.5	
55 +	719	313	43.5	290	40.3	115	16.0	
total	5,140	2,103	40.9	2,187	42.5	847	16.5	
Relaxation								
15-18	688	397	57.7	232	33.7	59	8.6	
19-24	760	471	62.0	249	32.8	40	5.3	
25-34	1,121	792	70.7	283	25.2	46	4.1	
35-54	1,852	1,370	74.0	389	21.0	92	5.0	
55 and over	719	515	71.6	194	27.0	x	x	
total	5,140	3,545	69.0	1,347	26.2	247	4.8	
Sense of Achievement								
15-18	688	455	66.1	162	23.5	71	10.3	
19-24	760	459	60.4	232	30.5	69	9.1	
25-34	1,121	630	56.2	381	34.0	110	9.8	
35-54	1,852	984	53.1	681	36.8	186	10.0	
55 +	719	345	48.0	277	38.5	95	13.2	
total	5,140	2,873	55.9	1,733	33.7	531	10.3	

con't...

Table 15 (con't)

Female

	Active pop*	Very Important		Somewhat Important		Not Important		
		000s	%	000s	%	000s	%	
Physical health and fitness								
15-18	433	314	72.5	111	25.6	x	x	
19-24	475	317	66.7	150	31.6	x	x	
25-34	660	407	61.7	235	35.6	x	x	
35-54	1,085	752	69.3	284	26.2	40	3.7	
55 +	516	358	69.4	127	24.6	x	x	
total	3,169	2,148	67.8	907	28.6	106	3.3	
Family Activities								
15-18	433	149	34.4	165	38.1	120	27.7	
19-24	475	172	36.2	187	39.4	115	24.2	
25-34	660	357	54.1	194	29.4	110	16.7	
35-54	1,085	631	58.2	317	29.2	128	11.8	
55 +	516	250	48.4	145	28.1	121	23.4	
total	3,169	1,559	49.2	1,008	31.8	594	18.7	
New Friends & Acquaintances								
15-18	433	203	46.9	210	48.5	x	x	
19-24	475	157	33.1	202	42.5	115	24.2	
25-34	660	251	38.0	274	41.5	135	20.5	
35-54	1,085	394	36.3	457	42.1	225	20.7	
55 +	516	285	55.2	152	29.5	79	15.3	
total	3,169	1,290	40.7	1,295	40.9	574	18.1	
Relaxation								
15-18	433	235	54.3	145	33.5	53	12.2	
19-24	475	326	68.6	130	27.4	x	x	
25-34	660	443	67.1	186	28.2	x	x	
35-54	1,085	761	70.1	288	26.5	x	x	
55 +	516	378	73.3	114	22.1	x	x	
Total	3,169	2,143	67.6	863	27.2	156	4.9	
Sense of Achievement								
15-18	433	306	70.7	100	23.1	x	x	
19-24	475	305	64.2	139	29.3	x	x	
25-34	660	348	52.7	246	37.3	66	10.0	
35-54	1,085	601	55.4	361	33.3	116	10.7	
55 +	516	319	61.8	132	25.6	64	12.4	
total	3,169	1,879	59.3	978	30.9	304	9.6	

*Denominator is the 'Active Population' aged 15 and older, who participated in sport on a regular basis.

* Only replies with estimates of 35,000 or more are indicated.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1998

13.3 Sport Participation and Sense of Belonging

Sport participation has been touted as an influencing factor in helping build healthy communities and improving our individual and collective quality of life. Engaging in community activities such as sport requires that people give freely of their time and effort to engage in common pursuits, thus increasing social interactions and strengthening bonds within ones community.

A new attitudinal question was added to the 1998 cycle of the GSS Sport Supplement asking respondents to describe their sense of belonging to their local community. This question is thought to have particular relevance to the concepts of connectivity, social cohesion and Canadian identity – the hypothesis being that participation in common sport activities is fundamental to local community identity and therefore to national identity.

The 1998 data reveal little difference between participants of amateur sport and non-participants in their reported levels of sense of belonging to their communities. In 1998, 63% of Canadians active in sport indicated their sense of belonging to be somewhat to very strong compared to 61% of non-active Canadians.

Despite this lack of evidence, the data is to be considered with caution as differences in the level of involvement in amateur sport (ie. belonging to a sport clubs/leagues, coaching, refereeing, and administering amateur sport) may vary the results. Indeed the data show that a higher proportion of Canadians involved in amateur sport as administrators/helpers (74% active versus 61% non active), referees (72% versus 62%), coaches (71% versus 61%) and those belonging to clubs/leagues (68% versus 61%) reported their sense of belonging as somewhat to very strong compared to Canadians not active in these capacities.

Table 16.
Perceived Sense of Belonging to the Community ⁽¹⁾ by Sport Participation, Canada,

	Total Canadians (15 years and older)		Sport Participants		Non-Participants	
	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%
TOTAL	24,260	100.0	8,309	100.0	14,034	100.0
Very strong	4,451	18.3	1,587	19.1	2,864	20.4
Somewhat strong	9,423	38.8	3,669	44.2	5,754	41.0
Somewhat weak	5,656	23.3	2,145	25.8	3,511	25.0
Very weak	2,115	8.7	719	8.7	1,396	9.9
No opinion / Not stated	2,615	10.8	188	2.3	509	3.6

(1) Survey asked: "How would you describe your sense of belonging to your local community?"
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1998

13.4 Sport Participation and Health Status

The health-related benefits of sport are well researched and documented. Mounting evidence establishes not only a link between physical activity and resistance to certain diseases, but also to better health, improved physical functioning and increased longevity.

There is growing concern among healthcare professionals, researchers and public policy experts that as our society ages and ‘baby boomers’ approach their retirement years, current levels of physical inactivity will likely hamper the quality of life for the majority of Canadians. Their inability to maintain independence will place increased demands on an already over-burdened health care system.

Being active in sport is related to positive perceptions of health. Canadians active in sport indicated a health rating of very good to excellent greater than non-active Canadians.

The latest GSS data indicate that being active in sport is related to positive perceptions of health. In 1998, 70% of Canadians active in sport indicated a health rating of very good to excellent compared to 54% of non-active Canadians. Thus, quite a substantial gap (16 percentage points) exists between active and non-active Canadians in terms of their perceived health status. This trend may, in part, be related to age differences. Older Canadians, who are less likely to rate their health as very good or excellent, are also less likely to be active in sport.

Table 17.

Perceived Health Status⁽¹⁾ by Participation in Sport, Canada, 1998

	Total Canadians (15 years and older)		Sport Participants		Non Participants	
	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%
TOTAL	24,260	100.0	8,309	100.0	14,034	100.0
Excellent	5,462	22.5	2,476	29.8	2,986	21.3
Very Good	7,834	32.3	3,315	39.9	4,519	32.2
Good	5,971	24.6	1,844	22.2	4,127	29.4
Fair	2,152	8.9	494	5.9	1,659	11.8
Poor	682	2.8	101	1.2	581	4.1
Not Stated	2,159	8.9	80	1.0	162	1.2

(1) Survey asked: “Compared to other people of your age, how would you describe your state of health?”
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1998

13.5 Sport Participation and Life Satisfaction

Given the many studies linking participation in sport with improved physical fitness and health, increased self esteem and well-being, through to fostering social interactions and building ties within ones community, it is hypothesized that sport participation may also be linked to increased life satisfaction.

In an effort to test this theory, a question on perceived level of life satisfaction was cross-tabulated against sport participants and non-participants. Cycle 12 of the General Social Survey asked Canadians the question: “How do you feel about your life as a whole right now?” and ranked their responses using a 4-point scale from very satisfied through to very dissatisfied.

The 1998 data show a small, yet notable increase in life satisfaction among persons active in sport. In fact, 94% of Canadians active in sport reported that they were somewhat to very satisfied with their lives compared with 89% of inactive Canadians – a difference of 5 percentage points. Once again, these data should be viewed with caution as this modest difference in level of life satisfaction may in fact be influenced by other factors such as age, health, current financial situation, family stability, etc.

Table 18.

Perceived Level of Life Satisfaction⁽¹⁾ by Participation in Sport, Canada, 1998

	Total Canadians (15 years and older)		Sport Participants		Non Participants	
	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%
TOTAL	24,260	100.0	8,309	100.0	14,034	100.0
Very satisfied	8,122	33.5	3,302	39.7	4,741	33.8
Somewhat satisfied	12,448	51.3	4,493	54.1	7,757	55.3
Somewhat dissatisfied	1,568	6.5	426	5.1	1,133	8.1
Very dissatisfied	327	1.3	50	0.6	276	2.0
No opinion/ not stated	1,794	7.4	38	0.5	126	0.9

(1) Survey asked: “How do you feel about your life as a whole right now?”

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1998