

Why Assess and Document Physical Activity

Native People care about their health and are concerned about the high rates of diabetes and obesity they see in their communities. We know that regular physical activity and healthy eating practices make a difference in preventing chronic illnesses such as heart disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, some types of cancers and obesity. Research has demonstrated time and time again that individuals of all ages can benefit from regular physical activity. However, despite the heightened public awareness many people continue to practice sedentary lifestyles. In order to effect change, health care providers need to promote physical activity as part of routine health maintenance.

Healthcare providers can be effective promoters of physical activity because patients respect their advice and as a result are more likely to change their own behaviors. Assessing, documenting, and encouraging healthy levels of physical activity for all patient encounters are important. By assessing a patient's level of physical activity, a healthcare provider can recommend a more appropriate and effective physical activity. Speaking with patients about physical activity on a consistent basis can enhanced personal responsibility for their own health. It also sets the stage to identify patient confidence and level of motivation to facilitate patient/clinician collaboration on ways to increase self-management support.

In order to promote physical activity, it becomes important to understand why people are sedentary. There are numerous behavioral, physiological and psychological variables related to initiating and maintaining physical activity. A common reason, for example, is a lack of time while injury is a common reason for stopping regular activity. As healthcare providers, it is our responsibility to recognize these barriers and tactfully approach a patient and encourage initiating/maintaining an appropriate exercise program. This is why we strongly encourage Indian Health System providers to routinely identify and monitor a patient's level of activity as a health factor and to document education on physical activity using the IHS National Patient Education Codes.

Thank You,
IHS PreventiveTask Force