**Physical Activity and Health Conditions in Veterans with Spinal Cord Injuries**

**Exercise Status (N=108)**
- 69% of all veterans reported regular physical activity
- 65% exercise at home only
- 31% exercise at home and at a gym
- 4% exercise at a gym only
- Most frequently reported exercise activities of active veterans:
  - Aerobic activities: Walking (19%)
  - Strengthening activities: Weight lifting (55%)
  - Flexibility activities: Stretching (60%)
  - Range of motion (7%)

**Top Reasons for Inactivity Reported by Non-exercise-active Veterans with SCI (N=49)**
- Costs of gym membership and/or equipment (61%)
- Lack of motivation or interest (57%)
- Lack of accessible facilities (42%)
- Unable to because of SCI or poor health (33%)
- Pain (10%)

**Conclusions**
- Contrary to public opinion, a large proportion of veterans with SCI consider themselves exercise-active.
- Self-identified exercisers reported significantly higher levels of exercise self-efficacy compared to non-exercisers.
- Self-identified exercisers reported high utilization rates of physical therapy emphasizing the critical role rehabilitation may play in ensuring exercise-active status of people with SCI.
- Although exercisers generally reported fewer chronic and secondary conditions, and greater levels of physical activity, the differences with non-exercisers were not always significant. The lack of stark health disparities may be due to a high average age (60) of the veteran subgroup, the uneven group size between exercisers and non-exercisers, or self-reported exercise behavior may be prone to bias because the survey is cross-sectional.
- Self-identified exercisers reported high utilization rates of physical therapy emphasizing the critical role rehabilitation may play in ensuring exercise-active status of people with SCI.

**Participant Characteristics by Exercise Status**

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<thead>
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<th>Exercise-active Veterans (n=108)</th>
<th>Non-exercise-active Veterans (n=49)</th>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>91%</td>
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<td>Age (mean) years</td>
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<td>White (vs. non-white)</td>
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**Secondary Conditions by Exercise Status**

- Exercise-active Veterans: 65% reported regular physical activity
- 45% of patients have seen a VA doctor or been to VA hospital in the past year
- 44% of patients have seen a non-VA doctor or non-VA hospital in the past year

**Functional Capacity**

- Participants were asked to rank the level of help needed for six daily activities. The 5-point scale ranged from "none of the time" to "all of the time."

**Therapy Use**

- "Exercisers" utilized physical therapy services at a significantly higher rate than "non-exercisers."

**Exercise Self-Efficacy**

- Veterans with SCI (n=157)
  - Costs of gym membership and/or equipment (61%)
  - Lack of motivation or interest (57%)
  - Lack of accessible facilities (42%)
  - Unable to because of SCI or poor health (33%)
  - Pain (10%)

**Conclusions**
- Exercise-active Veterans were more likely to have received physical therapy services in the past year compared to non-exercisers.
- There were no significant differences in self-reported health outcomes or quality of life measures between exercise-active and non-exercise-active Veterans with SCI.

**Background**

- People with spinal cord injuries (SCI) are at increased risk for secondary conditions (e.g., osteoporosis, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases), as well as medical complications (e.g., pressure sores and urinary tract infections).
- It is suggested that those with an active lifestyle experience a lower incidence of such conditions. However, people with SCI are frequently characterized as being less physically active than their non-disabled counterparts.

**Methods**

- Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants (both veterans and non-veterans) with SCI nationally for a mail survey on exercise and secondary conditions.
- Veteran participants were targeted via distribution of recruitment flyers to persons with SCI that were included on a list from the National SCI Database. Veteran status was ascertained by an affirmative response to a survey question inquiring whether they "ever served on active duty in the United States Armed Forces, either in the regular military or in the National Guard or Reserve Unit."

**Results**

- Veterans with SCI (n=157)
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