

Knowledge, practices and contributing factors for physical exercise among non-academic staff, University of Peradeniya

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According to WHO, physical exercise is defined as physical activity that is planned, structured and repetitive for the purpose of conditioning any part of the body. Even though it is proven that regular physical exercise reduces the incidence of coronary artery disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes mellitus, many types of cancers, depression and anxiety, most of the people do not practice regular physical exercise due to multiple factors. The objective of the current study was to determine the knowledge, practices and contributory factors for lack or adequacy of physical exercise among non-academic staff members of the University of Peradeniya.

A cross sectional descriptive study was conducted among non-academic staff members in the eight faculties of the University of Peradeniya. To fulfill the calculated sample size of 422, the subjects were selected randomly from each faculty proportionate to the size. A pre-tested self-administered questionnaire was used for data collection. The type of physical exercise and the duration was considered to determine the adequacy of physical exercise according to WHO standard recommendations.

Total sample studied was 410, with a response rate of 97.2%. Mean age was 38 years. Of them 51.7% (n=212) were males. Only 35.9% (n=147) practiced physical exercise adequately. Involvement in physical exercise was inadequate in 61.2% (n=251), and 2.9% (n=12) did not engage in physical exercise at all. Only 15.1% were able to list more than three types of physical exercises, and 15.1% knew none. Majority of the study population (95.1%) were aware that physical exercise helps in preventing diseases, though only 11.7% knew exercise helps in preventing cancer. The commonest reason for lack of physical exercise was a busy life schedule (61.7%), and 55.4% of the population gave the intention of avoiding risk factors as an encouraging factor for physical exercise. Of the study population only 11.7% (n=48) used the university gymnasium, 5.4% used the swimming pool and 22.7% used the university playground.

A higher percentage of the university's non-academic staff members did not engage in adequate physical exercise. Therefore, it is important to take measures to improve their physical exercise practices.