

Impact of Physical Inactivity on the World's Major Non-Communicable Diseases

A significant proportion of the world is physically inactive, contributing to a shortened life expectancy and increased risk of developing chronic health conditions including the 'world's major non-communicable diseases' (NCDs).

With a focus on coronary heart disease (CHD), type 2 diabetes and cancers, the study aimed to quantify that impact of physical activity (PA) on disease progression. Epidemiological statistical calculations and data obtained from organisations such as the World Health Organisation were used. The impact was quantified by predicting how much disease could be avoided if physical inactivity (PI) decreased, including the gain in life expectancy at a population and country level.

Globally, PI can explain 6% of deaths from CHD, 7% of deaths from type 2 diabetes, 10% of breast cancer and 10% of colon cancer. It is estimated that in 2008 alone, PI was responsible for >5.3 million deaths across the world. Even just a 10 or 25% decrease in PA could prevent 1.3 million deaths on average each year. Life expectancy would also increase by between half a year to one year.

Lee, I., Shiroma, E., Lobelo, F., Puska, P., Blair, S. and Katzmarzyk, P., 2012. Effect of physical inactivity on major non-communicable diseases worldwide: an analysis of burden of disease and life expectancy. The Lancet, 380(9838), pp.219-229.