

KEEPING WOMEN WARM TO SPORT IN WINTER



It's no surprise to know that participation in sport and physical activity declines in the colder, darker autumn and winter months. Over the years, we've heard lots about this from our partners and participants and evidence of the seasonal drop off is clear every year in Sport England's Active People Survey figures.

But less is known about why this happens and what - if anything - we can do to address this.

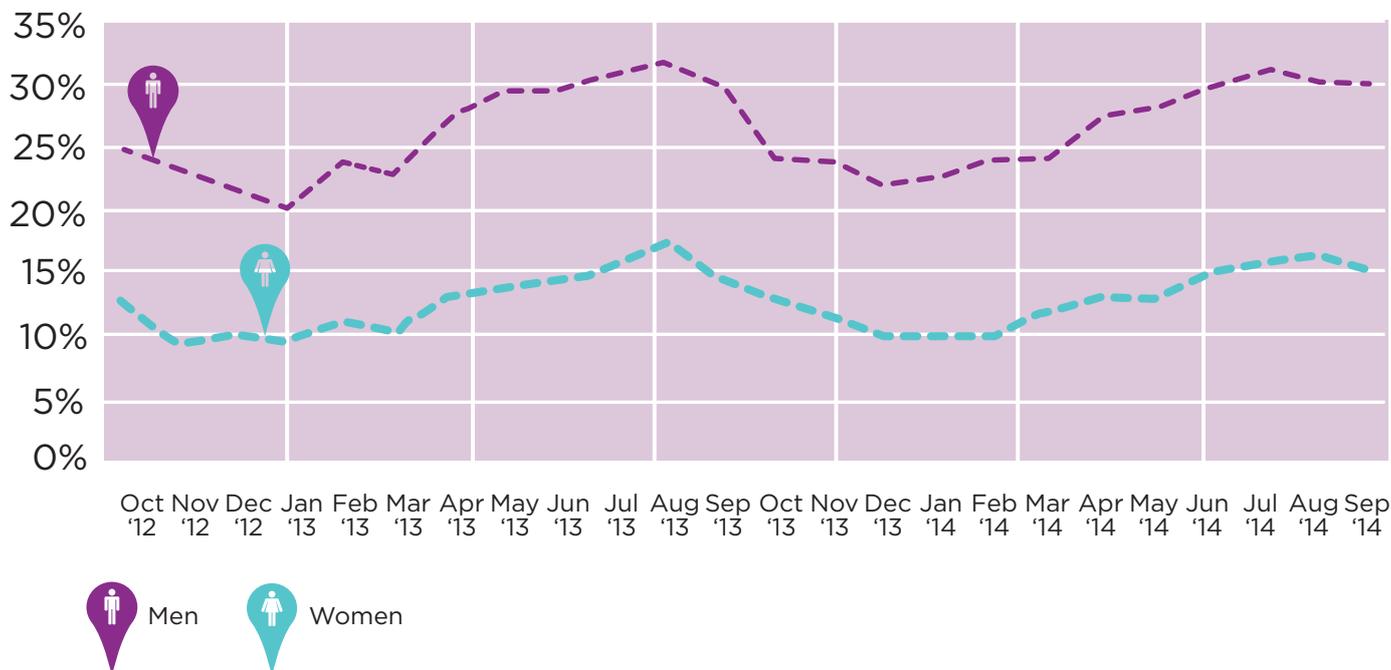
We wanted to check and challenge assumptions about what stops women from participating at this time of year. We found that many of our assumptions are true - it is inherently more difficult to take part when it's cold and dark outside. However, our assumption that personal safety is a participation barrier in winter was really challenged by the research.

Research highlighted that women are already employing a number of strategies to stay active in the colder months. Here, in this factsheet, we have outlined how you might apply our insights to begin tackling autumn/winter drop-out rates amongst women.

COOLING OFF PERIOD: WHAT HAPPENS TO WOMEN AND SPORT IN WINTER?

Sport England's Active People Survey (October 2012-September 2014) demonstrates a decline in participation in sport and physical activity during the autumn/winter period for everyone in the UK. Patterns are consistent across genders, with activity tailing off in November, before dipping to its lowest level between December and February. However, the data reveals that a higher proportion of women dropout compared to men. It also became clear that men's participation recovers slightly quicker at the beginning of the New Year.

Weekly participation in outdoor sports



Across all women for outdoor sports, the dropout rate from autumn to winter is 27%. This increases to 36% for women aged 55 to 64 and further increases to 47% for women aged 65 and above. While drop out mainly affects outdoor sports, indoor sports, including swimming, do see some decline during winter, which is again greater for women than for men.

WHAT DO WOMEN SAY ARE THE BARRIERS?

For our research, women were asked during autumn/winter to think about a recent occasion when they wanted to exercise but didn't and the associated barriers stopping them from doing so.

Most people face a combination of barriers and there is significant overlap and interplay between these.

Environmental barriers:

'I was going to go out cycling if the weather was nice when I woke up. Which it wasn't. I had shopping to do anyway and wasn't feeling great so I couldn't go'. Cyclist, London, 34

Environmental factors such as bad weather and fewer daylight hours make doing sport and exercise more challenging in autumn and winter, with 45% of respondents citing an environmental barrier to participation. Weather in particular came out as the biggest deterrent to activity with almost a third of the women stating this was the main reason for less activity.

Preparing for sport and physical activity on cold dark days also requires more effort. Consideration for extra clothes for warmth and safety, lights and planning ahead to schedule exercise in can all add extra obstacles to being active.

The weather was bad
(e.g. cold, wet, windy)



31%

Cultural barriers

50% of respondents selected a cultural barrier to participation during the winter months, citing that norms suggest it is a time to stay indoors and relax. Other commitments, can also take priority; social occasions, busy end of year work schedules, family events and Christmas shopping all push physical activity down the pecking order when it comes to scheduling.

I preferred to stay indoors
where it's warm



21%

Motivational barriers

Motivational barriers are most likely to affect those who exercise indoors or alone. These barriers have a direct impact on women's internal motivations to stay active. 28% of women cite feeling lazy or sluggish, another 28% lacked motivation and 29% were too tired to get out and get active.

I felt too tired



29%

Personal safety barriers

Only 6% of women selected personal safety as a barrier preventing them from exercising recently (during autumn). Women more likely to cite personal safety as a barrier were often younger, living in an urban area, and those with an impairment or disability.

However, when asked if personal safety concerns had ever had any impact on their likelihood to take part in sport and exercise, more women agreed, with over half selecting yes or maybe in response to this question. Concerns around 'harm' and 'intimidation' are higher among those who participate in physical activity only occasionally.

'I get less exercise with my daughter because of the dark evenings. I don't find it safe to ride along the paths during the winter even with reflectors, and I often think it too cold to be taking her out during the colder evenings'- Runner and cyclist, Birmingham, 34

Being safe on roads/
footpaths etc.



27%

OVERCOMING BARRIERS: What can I do to engage women in sport during autumn and winter?

The good news is that women are already finding ways to overcome the barriers to being physically active during autumn and winter. Three out of four women have previously applied at least one of the following strategies:

Strategies highlighted below tap into existing barriers:

- 1. Reappraising routines** – changing the time of day, the route or environment or changing the type of activity.
- 2. Preparing properly to make the experience enjoyable** – wearing warm and waterproof clothing, using apps and playlists or varying the activity to keep it interesting.
- 3. Preparing properly to feel safe** – being visible with lights and clothing, telling someone your route or taking a panic alarm
- 4. Reducing the risk of future opt out** – booking activity in advance, preparing the night before, or making a financial or social commitment

Strategies below tap into existing motivations:

- 1. Remembering the benefits** – remembering how good you felt the last time were active, using apps to monitor efforts or capture the benefits.
- 2. Setting longer term goals** – booking into an event or league, tracking performance, or setting specific goals e.g. fitness or social event.
- 3. Making it social** – going with a friend, committing to a regular class or team, meeting people to travel with, and using apps for encouragement.
- 4. Embracing the challenge** – Celebrating that you have overcome adversity or taking part in activities designed for the winter.



So harnessing barriers as well as motivations is the key.

When they do overcome the barriers, women told us that participation during autumn/winter can offer great rewards. The cold crisp air and the leaves on the ground can create an enjoyable setting to be active in. The feeling of having overcome adversity and taking on the challenge that the colder months bring can offer a great sense of accomplishment.

Here are four ways to apply our insight to help encourage women and girls to take part in sport during the winter months

1. Tailored initiatives for winter months

- a) Set clear goals to aim for during autumn/winter (and leading into spring) and make the goal feel achievable by clearly outlining what to do (and when)
- b) Track progress so participants have a sense of what they've done so far and what more they need to achieve
- c) Offer clear incentives and rewards for taking part and achieving those goals

2. Marketing the post-exercise 'zing' to help motivate women to stay active.

- a) Acknowledge the challenge: show participants you understand it is harder to keep going when the weather is cold/wet and the days are shorter
- b) Sell the 'epic feeling': capture and sell the positive and epic feeling women get from participating during autumn/winter. The challenge is greater but the reward is even sweeter!
- c) Keep sport and fitness prominent: try and keep the conversations leading up to Christmas.

3. Make it easy

- a) Scheduling and routines: with shorter daylight hours, consider session scheduling to make it as easy as possible for women to attend. Do your sessions align with the local public transport timetable? Could your sessions be shorter for those who prefer it?
- b) Personal safety: consider how to maximise women's feelings of personal safety, either during or on the way to/from an activity.
- c) Appropriate gear: how could you provide or advise on appropriate gear to help participants feel properly prepared and make the experience enjoyable?

4. Build a social community

- a) Support and encouragement: consider how you might create - or tap into - a social community, where participants are able to connect, communicate, support and encourage each other and feel part of something.
- b) Accountability: how could you then use a social community to make participants feel accountable to one another (i.e. acknowledging each other's efforts and achievements)?

We want to hear from you - if you have found this useful or have applied the insight with a specific programme or project let us know by emailing info@womeninsport.org (subject title: Keeping women warm to winter sport).

To find out more about our research and how Women in Sport could help to transform your sport offer for women, please visit www.womeninsport.org

