

# Unlike less educated people, college grads more active on weekends than weekdays

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People's educational attainment influences their level of physical activity both during the week and on weekends, according to a study whose authors include two University of Kansas researchers.

The study finds that, on average, those with a college degree are more active on Saturdays and Sundays than on a typical weekday—whereas for people without a high school degree, the opposite is true.

"Educational attainment predicts physical activity differently on weekends and weekdays," said Jarron M. Saint Onge, a KU assistant professor of sociology and the study's lead author. "Importantly, we focus not simply on total time people are engaged in recommended levels of physical activity, but the quality of the activity by focusing on the average levels of activity intensity per minute by day. An understanding of the factors that reduce time spent in low intensity or sedentary behaviors can inform activity intervention measures and could potentially reduce socioeconomic status differences in preventable morbidity and mortality."

While work is a frequently cited barrier to exercise, the study finds evidence of a more complex relationship. For example, those who take more steps (as measured by an accelerometer) during the week—presumably at work—are less likely to be active on weekends.

Saint Onge and co-authors Kyle Chapman, a KU doctoral candidate in sociology, and Patrick M. Krueger, an assistant professor of sociology at

the University of Colorado-Denver, will present their findings at the the 109th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association.

The researchers examined accelerometer data from the 2005-06 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), which measures how many steps U.S. adults take per day and the intensity of those steps. By focusing on intensity, researchers can determine the amount of time an individual spends in various activity categories such as sedentary, moderate, or vigorous activity.

Chapman said even when he and his co-authors controlled for several factors, such as income disparities and whether or not individuals mostly sit or stand at work, they still found that educational attainment was associated with people's patterns of physical activity throughout the week.

"Education affects people both at the individual level and at their social level," Chapman said. "Physical activity is encouraged or discouraged in different groups."

On weekdays, the study found that people with a college degree spend an average of 8.72 hours a day in sedentary activity, compared to 7.48 hours for a person without a high school degree.

According to Chapman, these patterns were unsurprising considering past research has found that less-educated groups of people typically spend more time engaged in occupational physical activity at their jobs during the week. That occupational activity, however, may take place at low energy thresholds, include repetitive motions, and may have potentially negative health consequences.

On weekends, a person with a [college degree](#) spends an average of 8.12 hours a day in sedentary activity—less than during the week. On the

other hand, a person without a [high school](#) degree actually spends more time in sedentary activity—7.86 hours per day—than they do during the week.

Chapman said the study's findings could be useful in developing targeted public health initiatives related to [physical activity](#) based on a person's [educational attainment](#).

"You have to be flexible. We have to give people different ideas," Chapman said. "We have to have discussions on what works for some and what works for others."

**More information:** The paper, "Objective Physical Activity Patterns of U.S. Adults by Educational Status," will be presented on Tuesday, Aug. 19, at 10:30 a.m. PDT in San Francisco at the American Sociological Association's 109th Annual Meeting.

Provided by American Sociological Association

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