



Alcohol

The general recommendation is: no more than 2 drinks per day and 14 per week; no more than 4 drinks on any one occasion.

For women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, and those who are breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is advised as the safest option.

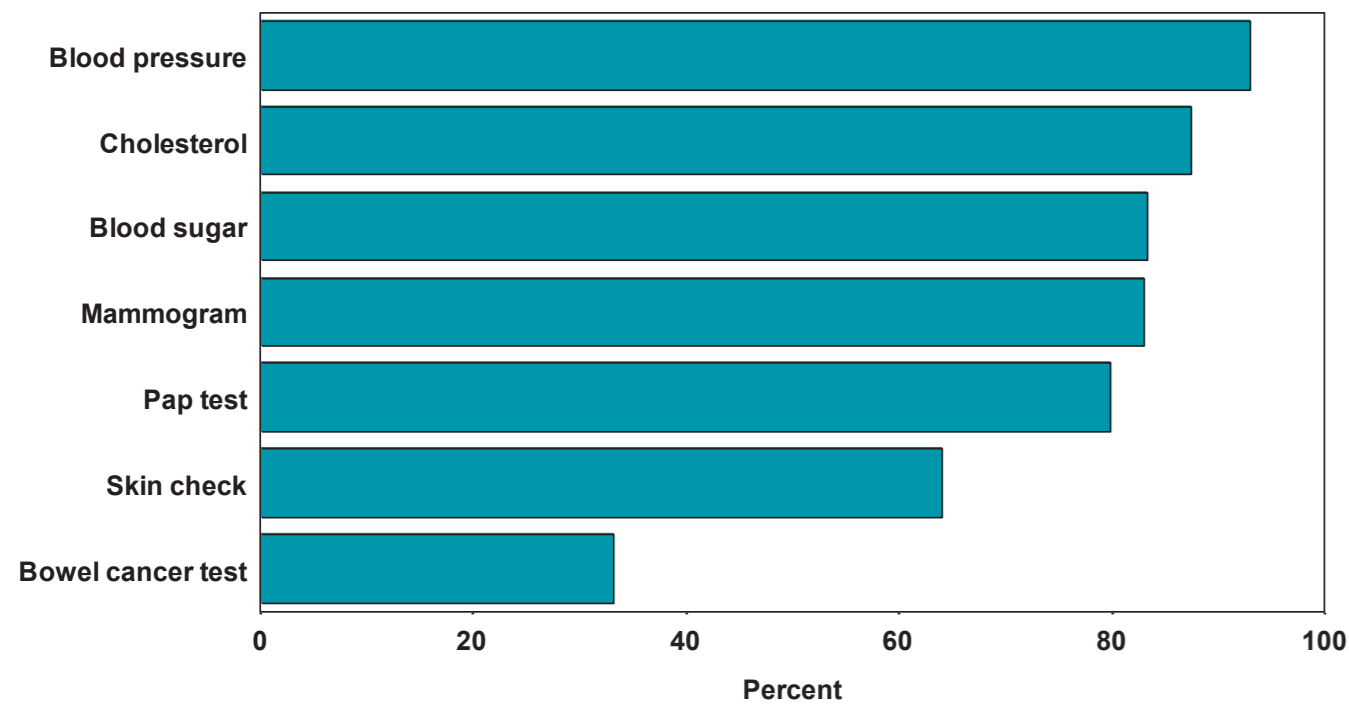
Most ALSWH participants did not have more than 14 alcoholic drinks per week and most had at least 1 alcohol free day. Younger women were most likely to have more than 2 drinks per day, but by the time these women were 26-31 years old, more than 70% met this guideline. Likewise, the percentage of women meeting the recommendation to have no more than 4 drinks on any one occasion increased as these women moved from their 20s into their 30s.

Health checks



More than 90% of women in the 1946-51 cohort had their blood pressure checked and more than 80% had their cholesterol and blood sugar measured and had mammograms and pap tests in the past 2 or 3 years, in accordance with guidelines. Checks for skin and bowel cancer were less common. As might be expected, women who didn't work full-time and who received reminders from their GP were more likely to have any of these health checks.

Percentage of women in the 1946-51 reporting health checks at Survey 6



Putting information together to improve health and health care services for Australian women

Background

You may remember that during this project we have asked you for permission to receive details from Medicare Australia about your use of Medicare-funded health services. By putting the Medicare data together with the survey data, we have looked at general patterns of use of health services, particularly general practitioner and specialist consultations. Having these data has helped us to write reports about women's access to health services and particularly about how much the services cost according to where women live around the country. These reports have been provided to the government to help improve services for women.

What's new?

Following discussion with Medicare Australia, information held by them will be regularly provided to the research team without your needing to consent every time. Other information, such as birth and death records, disease registers and hospital discharge records, aged care and community datasets, will also be available subject to strict privacy and confidentiality rules. Names and addresses are not included with the information. The project staff analysing these datasets and the survey data, have signed confidentiality statements and they have no information in the datasets that could identify an

individual person. This research is conducted in accordance with relevant privacy requirements and other legislation protecting this information.

What happens next?

You do not need to do anything. However if you have any questions about this process or if you need more information, please call the Freecall number and we will send you a more detailed information sheet. If you have concerns about this new method of data collection, you can opt out of this by phoning the Freecall number **1800 068 081**. We will provide updates in future newsletters about our progress and findings and how this research will benefit the health of women now and in the future.

If you have any concerns about this project, and would prefer to discuss these with an independent person, you should feel free to contact the Human Research Ethics Officer at either the University of Newcastle or University of Queensland.

The Human Research Ethics Officer
Research Branch, The University of Newcastle,
University Drive, Callaghan NSW 2308
Ph: 02 4921 6333

The Human Research Ethics Officer
University of Queensland, St Lucia Qld 4072
Ph: 07 3365 3924

New Young Cohort

ALSWH is now recruiting a new young cohort of young women aged 18-23. But we need some help to spread the word. If you know any women in this age group, please encourage them to join by giving them one of the cards included with your newsletter or by asking them to visit:

www.alswh.org.au/survey

Your experience and long-standing contribution could encourage them to become involved and add to the legacy that you have initiated.

CONTACT US:

Website: www.alswh.org.au **Email:** info@alswh.org.au **Freecall:** 1800 068 081

Mail: Women's Health Australia, Reply Paid 70, Hunter Region MC, NSW 2310



Newsletter

women's
health
australia

australian longitudinal
study on women's health

Hello again from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health!

While the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH) surveys provide important data on health issues for women now in their 30s, 60s and 80s, governments have very little information on the health needs of younger women. Therefore ALSWH has been commissioned to collect data from a new group of young women aged 18-23. The survey is being conducted online at www.alswh.org.au/survey.

Please invite and encourage all young women you know in this age group to participate. It is important to let health and other authorities know the real needs of 18-23 year old women in Australia (especially in rural and remote areas).

Each year the ALSWH team produces a report for the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) on a particular theme. These reports are used by the Department to formulate national policy. For example the second National Women's Health Policy, released in 2010, relied heavily on information from the ALSWH. Governments and non-government organisations, such as the Heart Foundation and cancer organisations, develop policies, health promotion messages and services for women's health. ALSWH data show whether or not these work well.

The ALSWH report for 2012 was about whether women are following guidelines for good health that are developed by organisations such as National Health and Medical Research Council, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, and the Department of Health and Ageing. The report showed that most ALSWH participants meet the guidelines in that they don't smoke, they don't consume more than two standard alcoholic drinks per day, and most have checks for cancer, high blood pressure and cholesterol.

Women are less likely to be meeting the guidelines for adequate physical activity (30 minutes a day). Very few women meet all the guidelines for adequate nutrition, especially the recommended intake of '2 fruit and 5 vegetables each day'. Additionally, the proportions of ALSWH participants who are overweight and obese according to guidelines for healthy weight have been increasing since the start of the study.

THANK YOU for your continuing participation in this important study and welcome to the young women joining the new cohort. Thanks also to family members who assist our oldest participants, allowing their contribution to continue as they reach 90 years of age.

For 17 years you have provided vital information about health and health services for Australian women.

IT'S NOT TOO LATE! The sixth survey, 2012, for women of the 1973-78 cohort is still open. If you've not yet completed your survey and need a copy, please let us know: 1800 068 081 or info@alswh.org.au. Both paper and online surveys are available.

Physical activity

The National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians outline the minimum levels of physical activity for health benefit (Department of Health and Ageing, 1999). The guidelines recommend that all adults:

“put together at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days” and “if you can, also enjoy some regular vigorous activity for extra health and fitness”.

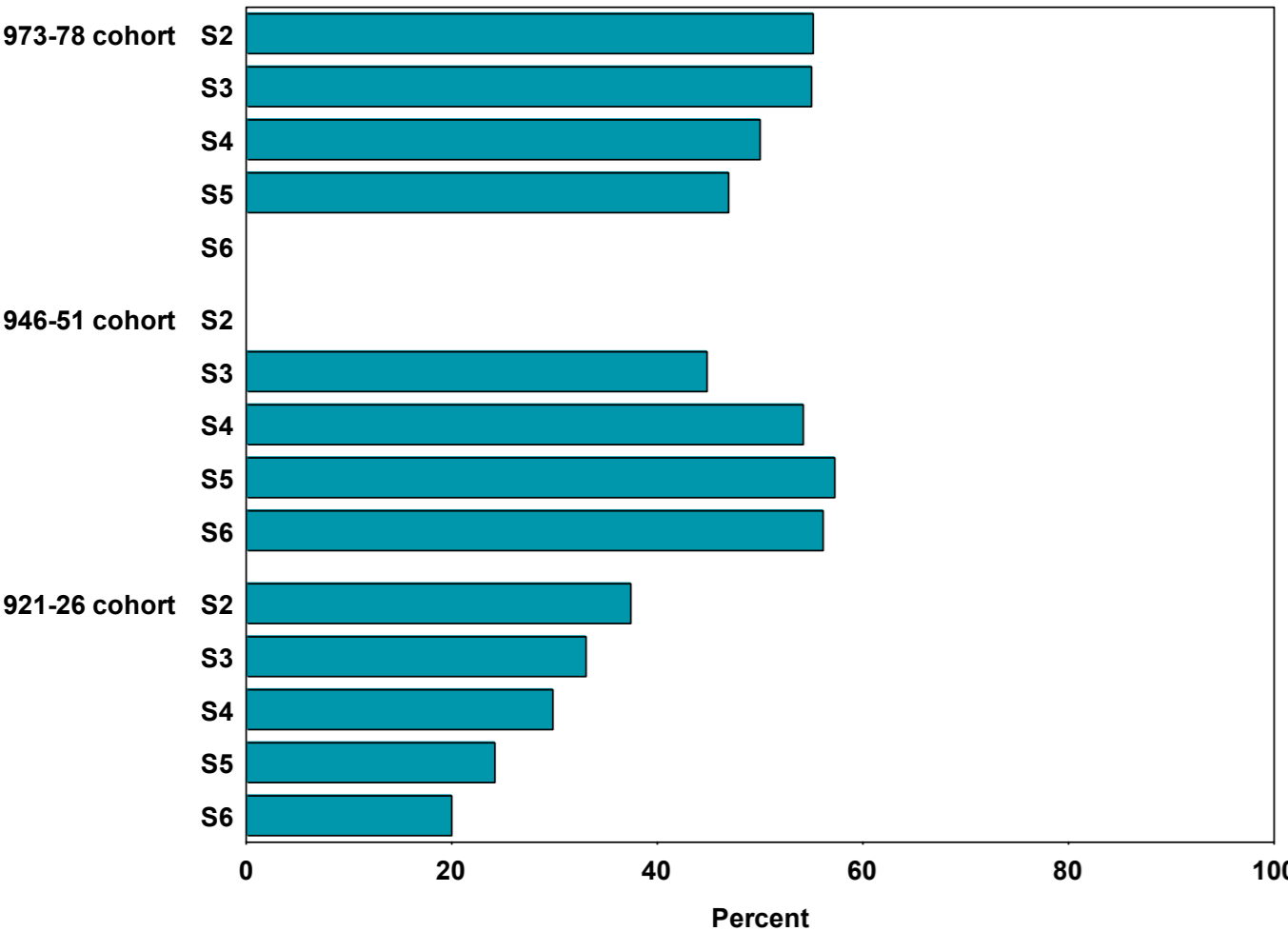
In ALSWH, while younger and older women were less likely to meet the guideline for 30 minutes of activity each day with each survey, women in the 1946-51 cohort were more likely to engage in adequate physical

activity. We also know that physical activity is affected by different events in women’s lives such as marriage, childbirth and work, as well as changes in physical capacity that come with age. Within individuals, there was a great variation in activity levels from one survey to another with only 18% of women in the 1973-78 and 1946-51 cohorts meeting the physical activity guideline at all surveys.



Although it is recommended that adults engage in 30 minutes of physical activity daily, health benefits can be seen for those who participate in at least some physical activity daily.

Percentage of women adhering to physical activity guidelines



Overweight and obesity



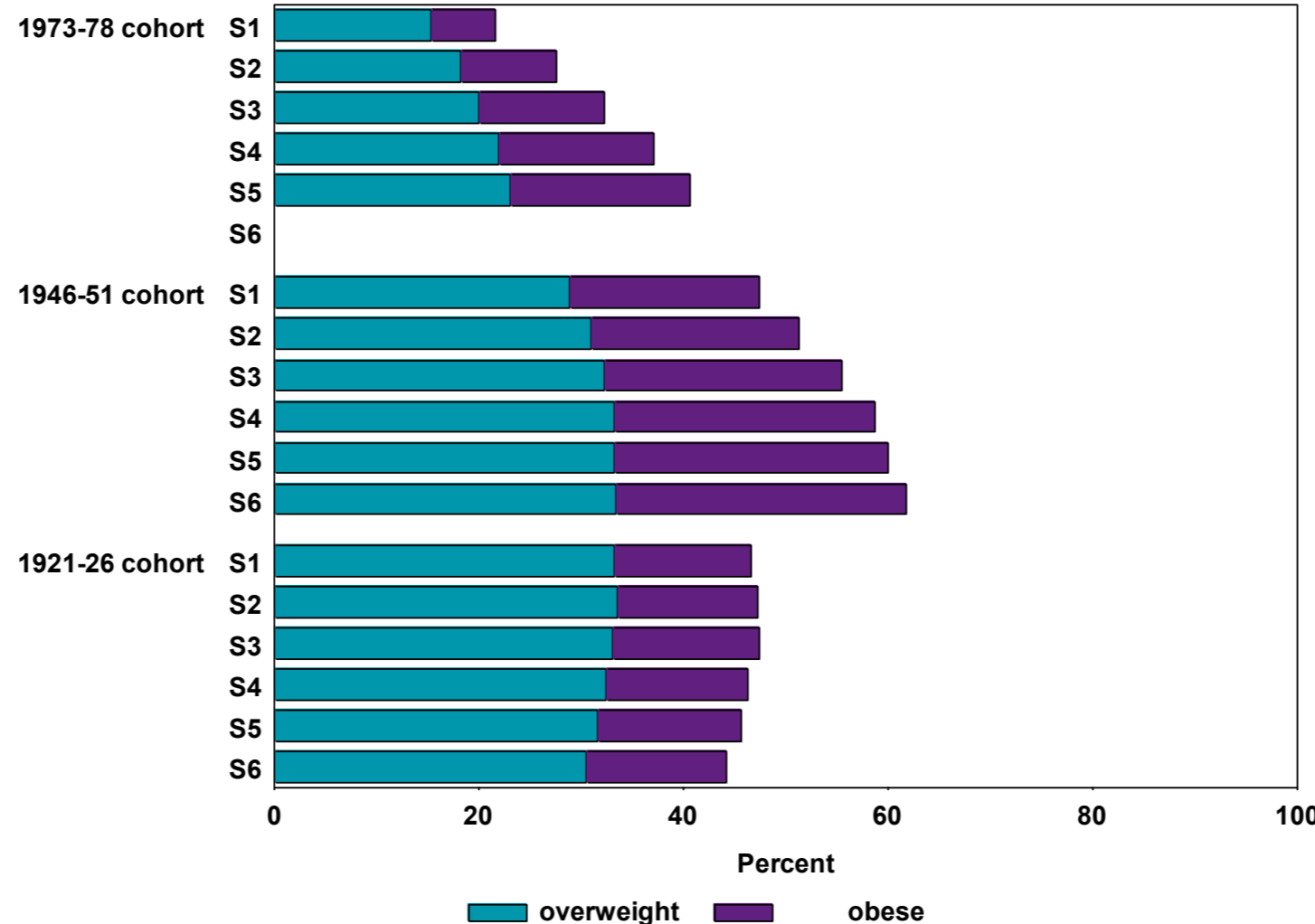
The guidelines recommend that ‘healthy weight’ is when BMI (weight in kg/height in m²) is less than 25.

Since 1996, the overall trend in the younger and middle cohorts was for women to gain weight and for fewer women to meet the guidelines for healthy weight at each survey.

The greatest increases were seen in the women born in 1973-78. By survey 5 in 2009, around 45% of this cohort was overweight or obese. Few women lost weight.

At the start of the study, 47% of the 1946-51 cohort were already overweight. This percentage increased over time but with some levelling off in later years. In contrast, weight did not change much in the women in the oldest cohort.

Percentage of women who are overweight or obese across all surveys



‘The Healthy Weight Website’ hosted by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing provides useful information and tools for improving diet and physical activity, managing weight and calculating BMI.

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/healthyactive/publishing.nsf/Content/healthyweight>



Diet

The current recommendations (from the Australian Guidelines to Healthy Eating) for women who are not pregnant or breastfeeding are shown in the table below. Two ALSWH surveys asked women about the food they have eaten. The table also shows the percentages of women meeting these guidelines.

Food Group	Serves per day	Percentage of women meeting the guideline		
		1973-78	1946-51	1921-26
Cereals (including breads, rice, pasta, noodles)	4-9 serves	2%	10%	*
Vegetables (including legumes)	5 or more serves	<1%	2%	8%
Fruit	2 or more serves	21%	47%	70%
Dairy (including milk, yoghurt, cheese)	2 or more serves	14%	33%	*
Meat and meat substitutes (including fish, poultry, eggs, nuts, legumes)	1 or more serves	71%	83%	*
Extras	2.5 or fewer serves	12%	32%	*

* Less dietary data have been collected for women born in 1921-26

Most women met guidelines for one serving of meat or similar foods each day. In contrast very few had 5 or more serves of vegetables or 4-9 serves of cereal per day. Other national studies have found similar results. It would appear that the guidelines are unrealistic for most women.

Smoking

All health advice is simply not to smoke.

In Australia, women are responding to quit smoking messages. While around half the ALSWH participants had smoked at some time, the main change since the study began is that women have quit smoking. While some of the younger women took up smoking over the course of the study, the majority of these women quit by 2009, so that overall the prevalence of smoking was 13%. Among women born in 1946-51, smoking has declined from 14% in 1996 to 8% now. However some groups of women, particularly those with less education and those in rural areas, remain at higher risk of continuing to smoke.

