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BLS Spotlight on Statistics: Sports and Exercise

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BLS Spotlight on Statistics: Sports and Exercise

Abstract

[Exercise] What percentage of people living in the United States participates in sports and exercise activities on a given day? Has that changed over time? Who is more likely to exercise? What kinds of sports and exercise activities do people do? When do they exercise and play sports?

The American Time Use Survey (ATUS) collects information on how, where, and with whom Americans spend their time, providing data on a full range of activities. This **Spotlight** uses data from the ATUS to examine participation and time spent in sports and exercise activities.

Keywords

American Time Use Survey, ATUS, sports, exercise, participation

Comments

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MAY 2017

Sports And Exercise

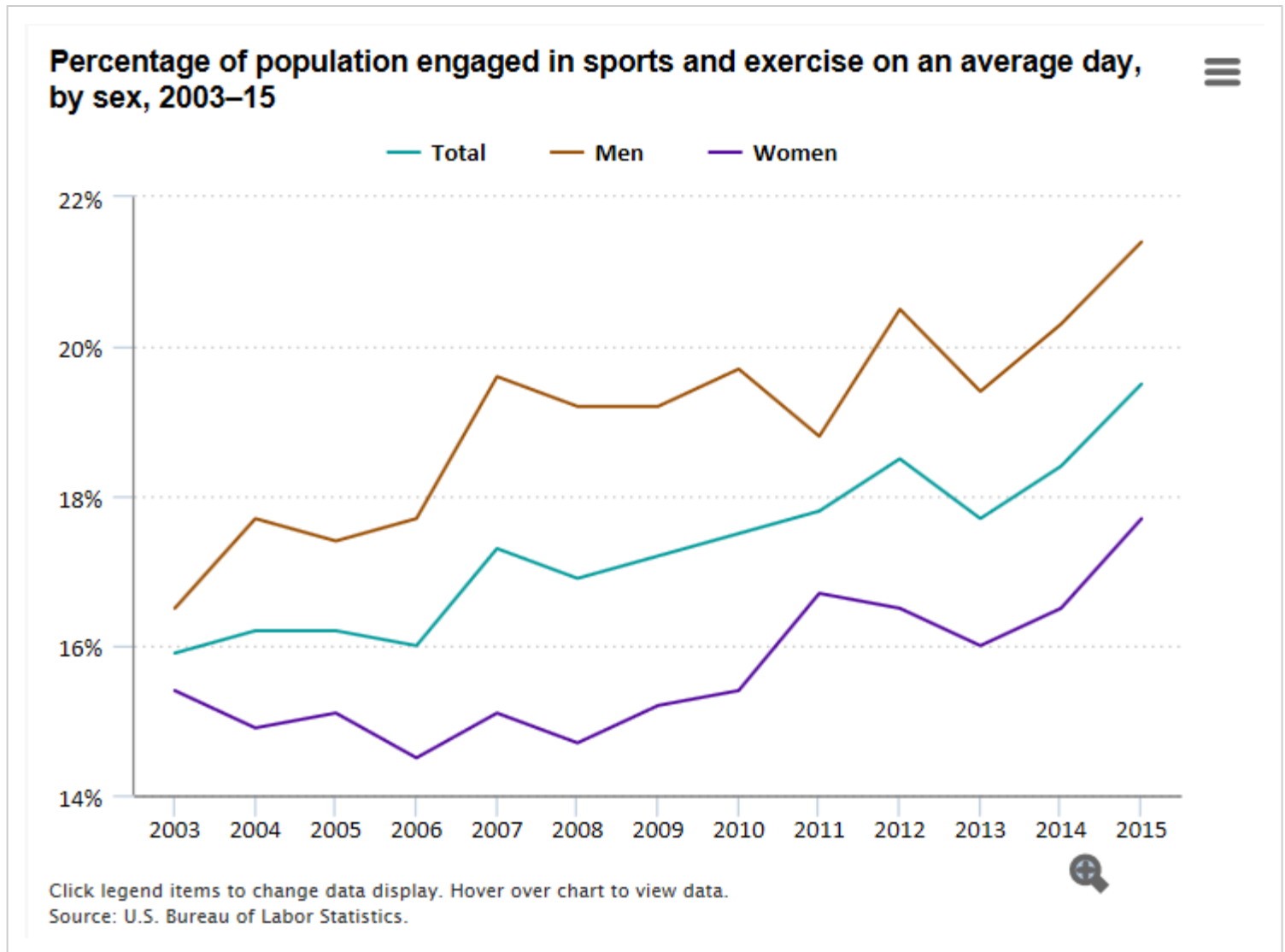
Rose A. Woods

What percentage of people living in the United States participates in sports and exercise activities on a given day? Has that changed over time? Who is more likely to exercise? What kinds of sports and exercise activities do people do? When do they exercise and play sports?

The [American Time Use Survey](#) (ATUS) collects information on how, where, and with whom Americans spend their time, providing data on a full range of activities. This Spotlight uses data from the ATUS to examine participation and time spent in sports and exercise activities.

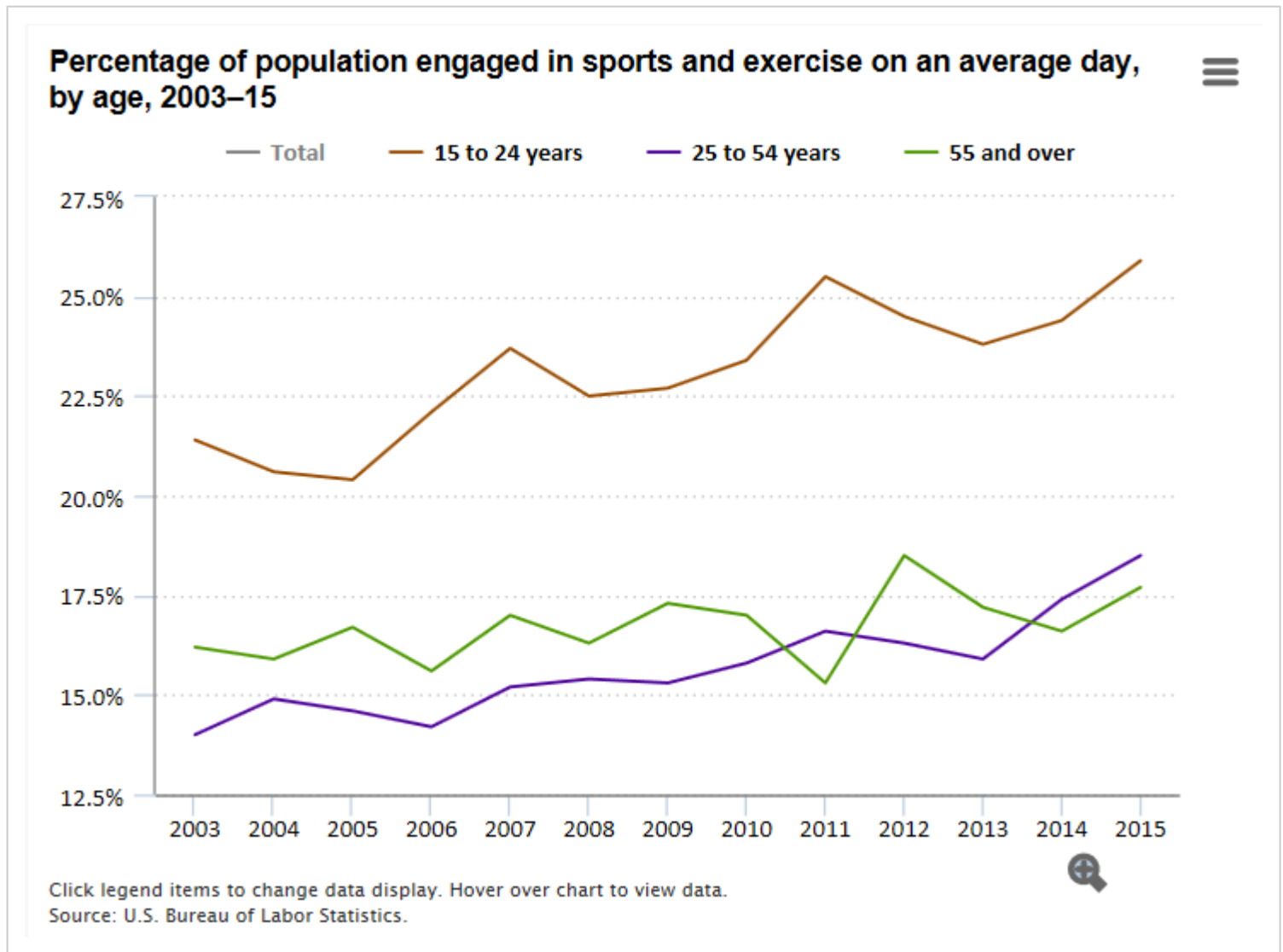
Men's and Women's Participation in Sports and Exercise, 2003–15

From 2003 to 2015, average daily participation rates in sports and exercise rose by 3.6 percent. In 2003, 15.9 percent of those aged 15 and older participated in some form of exercise, compared with 19.5 percent in 2015. Both men and women were more likely to exercise in 2015 than in 2003; men's participation in sports and exercise on an average day increased by 4.9 percentage points, and women's participation increased by 2.3 percentage points. Men also were more likely to exercise on a given day than women were throughout the entire 2003–15 period.



Participation in Sports and Exercise by Age, 2003–15

From 2003 to 2015, people in all age groups increased their participation in sports and exercise on an average day. Individuals aged 15 to 24 and those aged 25 to 54 increased their participation by 4.5 percentage points, and those aged 55 and older increased their participation by 1.5 percentage points. In all years, people aged 15 to 24 were more likely to exercise on a given day than those aged 25 and older. In 2015, 25.9 percent of those aged 15 to 24 engaged in sports or exercise on a given day, compared with 18.5 percent of those aged 25 to 54 and 17.7 percent of those aged 55 and over.

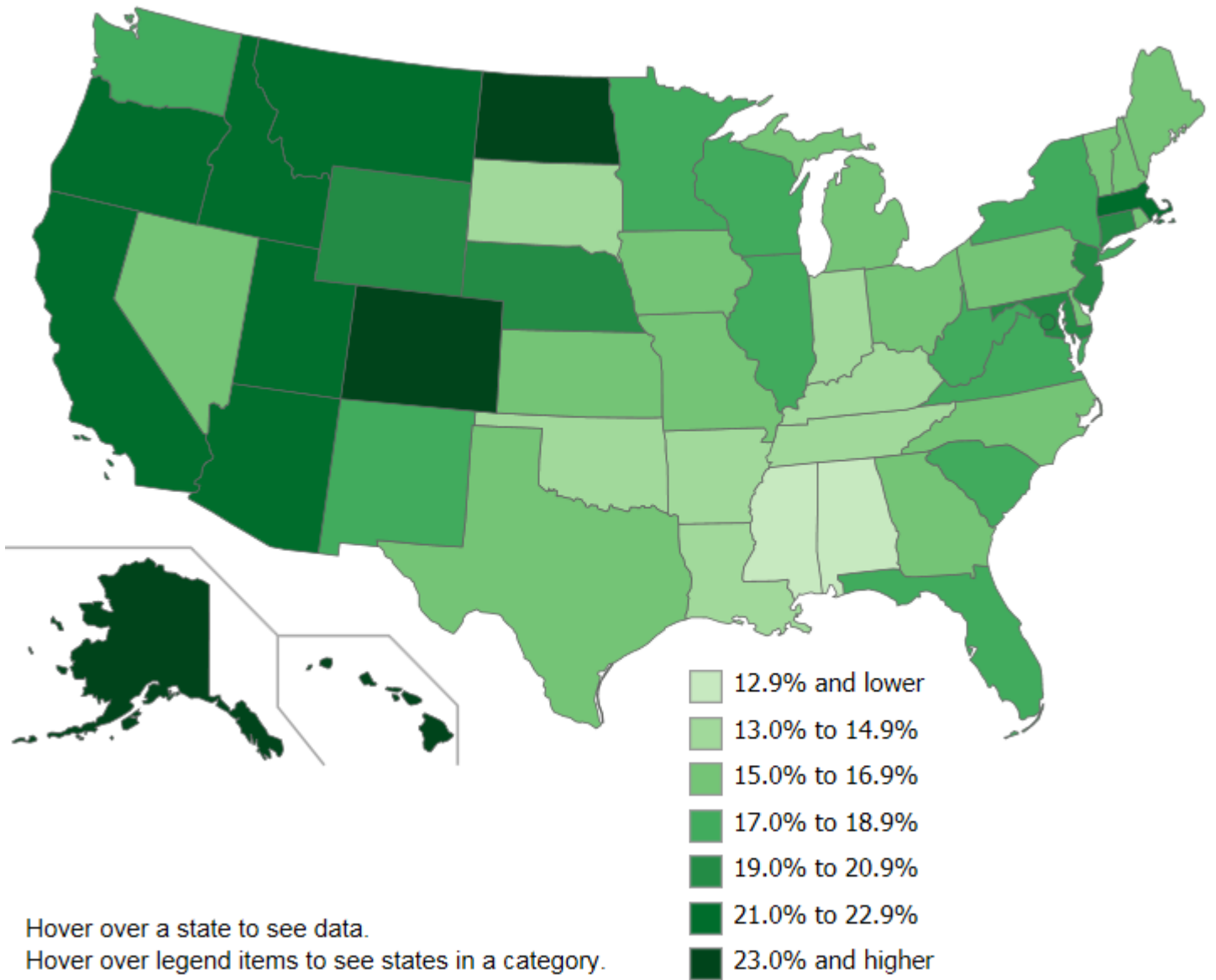


Participation in Sports and Exercise across the United States

In 2009 to 2015, people living in Western states were generally more likely to participate in sports or exercise activities on a given day than were those living in other regions of the United States. There were some exceptions to this general observation: Massachusetts had one of the highest participation rates in the country, with 22.5 percent of its residents engaging in sports and exercise on an average day, and, compared with its Western neighbors, Nevada had a lower participation rate—16.0 percent.

For most states, the share of residents who participated in sports and exercise on an average day was about the same in 2009 to 2015 compared with 2003 to 2008. However, comparing these time periods, participation in sports and exercise increased in the following states: California, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New York, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

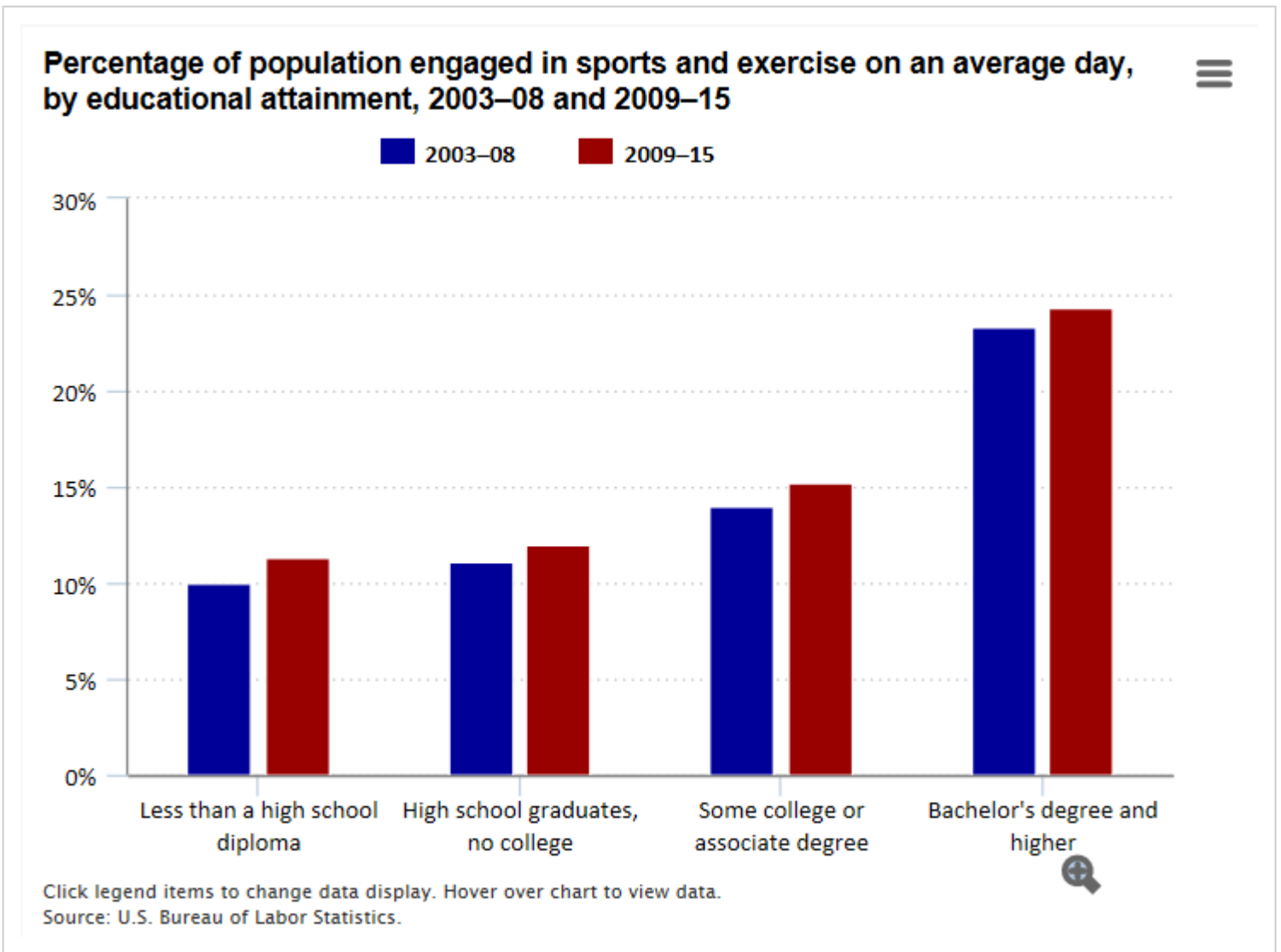
Percentage of population engaged in sports and exercise on an average day, by state, 2009–15



Hover over a state to see data.
Hover over legend items to see states in a category.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

More School, More Play

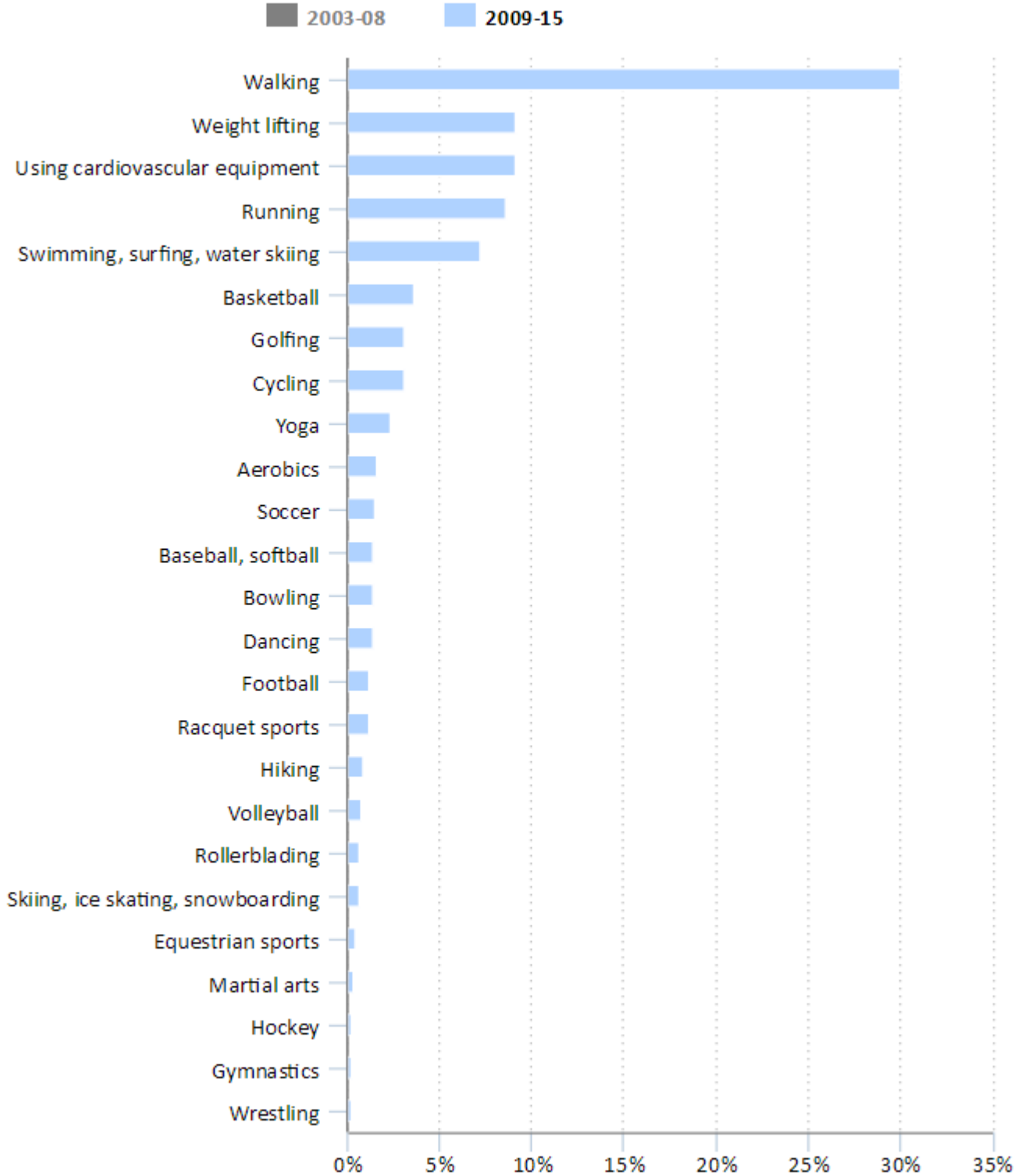
People with higher levels of education were more likely to participate in sports and exercise. In 2009 to 2015, among people aged 25 years and older, those with a bachelor’s degree or higher were more than twice as likely to participate in sports and exercise activities on an average day than were those with a high school diploma or less—24.3 percent, compared with 12.0 percent for those with a high school diploma and 11.3 percent for those with less than a high school diploma. However, individuals in all educational groups were more likely to participate in sports and exercise on an average day in 2009 to 2015 compared with 2003 to 2008.



Walking is the Most Popular Exercise Activity

From 2009 to 2015, of the 18.1 percent of people in the United States aged 15 and older who engaged in sports and exercise activities on a given day, 30.0 percent walked for exercise, making it the most popular sports or exercise activity. Weight lifting, using cardiovascular equipment, and running were also popular forms of exercise. Of those who engaged in sports or exercise on an average day, 9.1 percent spent some time lifting weights. The same share (9.1 percent) spent time using cardiovascular equipment, and 8.6 percent engaged in running on days they exercised. (Note: the percentages do not sum to 100 percent because only selected activities are included. People also may engage in more than one type of sports and exercise activity on a given day.)

Percentage of people aged 15 and older who engaged in sports and exercise on an average day, by specific activity, 2003–08 and 2009–15



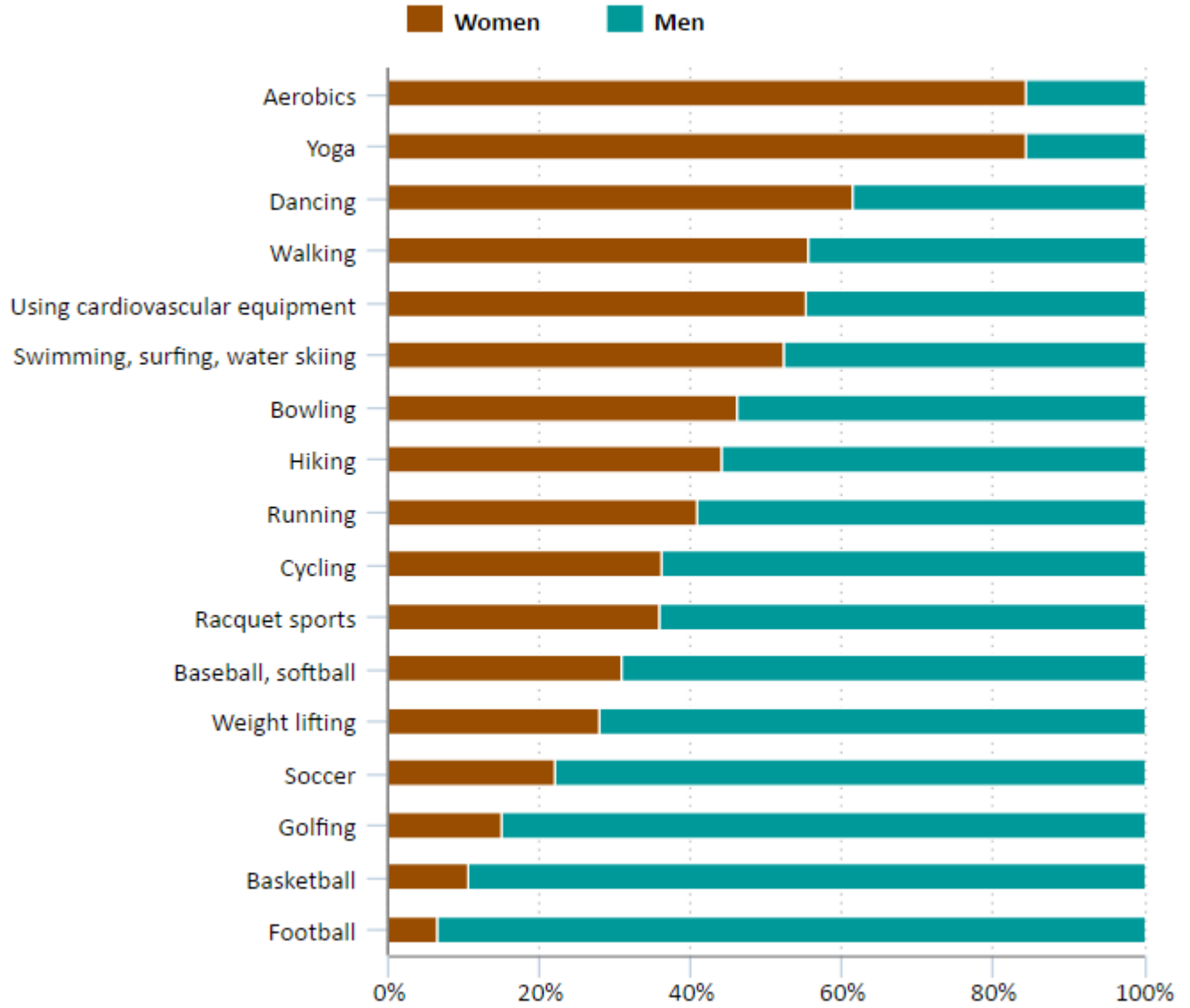
Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
 Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.



Sports and Exercise Activities Often Differ for Men and Women

While men were more likely than women to participate in sports and exercise activities on a given day, men's and women's preferences for specific types of exercise or sports activities differed. Football, basketball, golf, and soccer were male-dominated sports, that is, most people who engaged in these sports on an average day were men. For example, in 2009 to 2015, 93.6 percent of those who played football were men. Yoga and aerobics were most often done by women. Bowling and swimming, surfing, and water skiing were done about equally by men and women in 2009 to 2015.

Percent distribution by sex of people aged 15 and older who engaged in sports and exercise on an average day, by specific activity, 2009–15

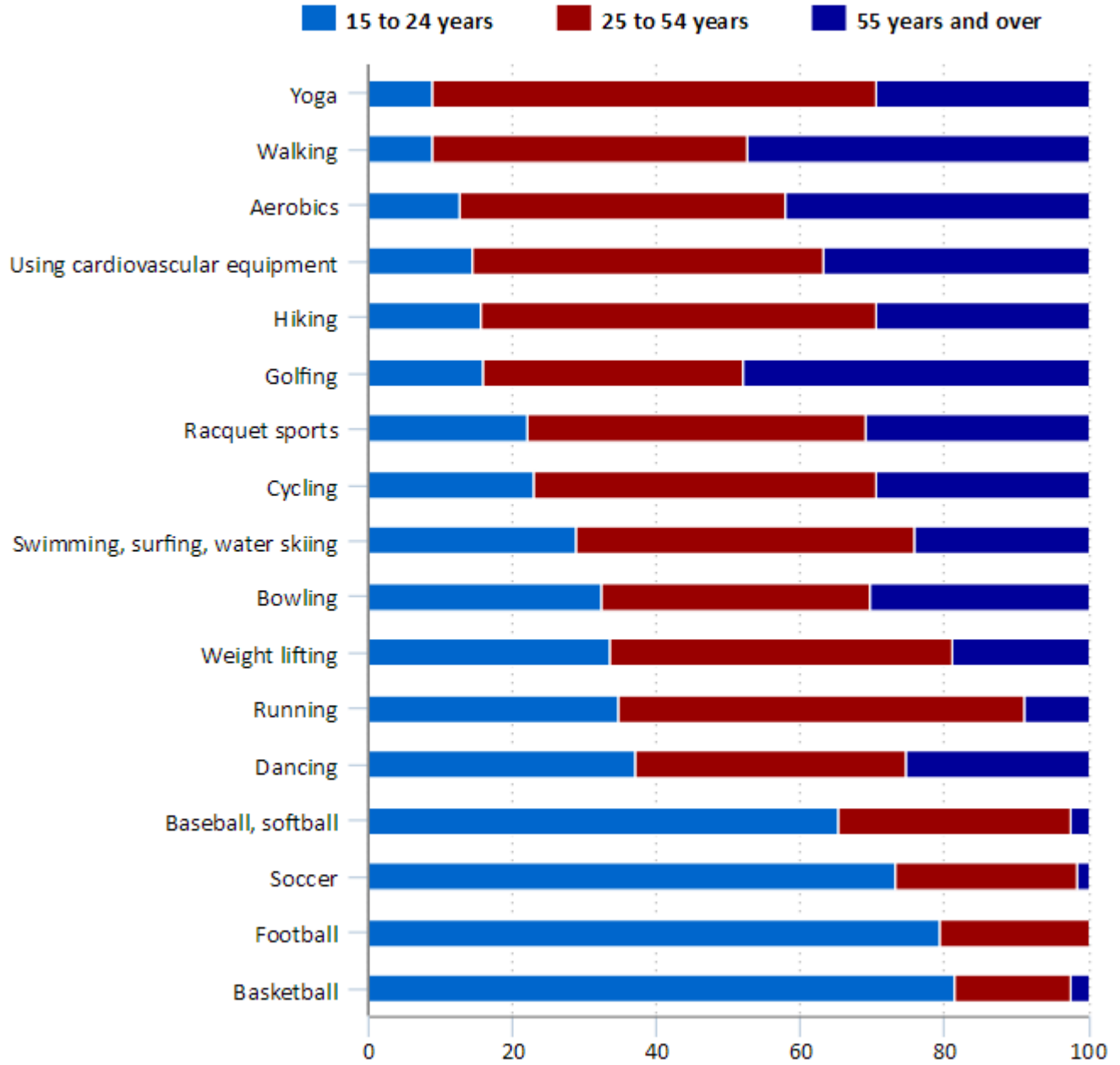


Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Sports and Exercise Activities by Age

People in different age groups also demonstrated varied preferences in sports and exercise activities. In 2009 to 2015, younger people (those aged 15 to 24 years) accounted for most of those who participated in team sports such as basketball, football, and soccer. People aged 25 to 54 accounted for most of those practicing yoga (61.9 percent), running (56.3 percent), and hiking (54.9 percent). While those over age 55 did not account for a majority of participants in any of the activities measured, they did account for relatively larger shares of those who played golf and walked for exercise. Bowling was the most age neutral of the activities; each age group accounted for at least 30.0 percent of this sport's participants.

Percent distribution by age group of people who engaged in sports and exercise on an average day, by specific activity, 2009–15



Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
 Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Median Age of Participants in Sports and Exercise in 2009–15, compared with 2003–08

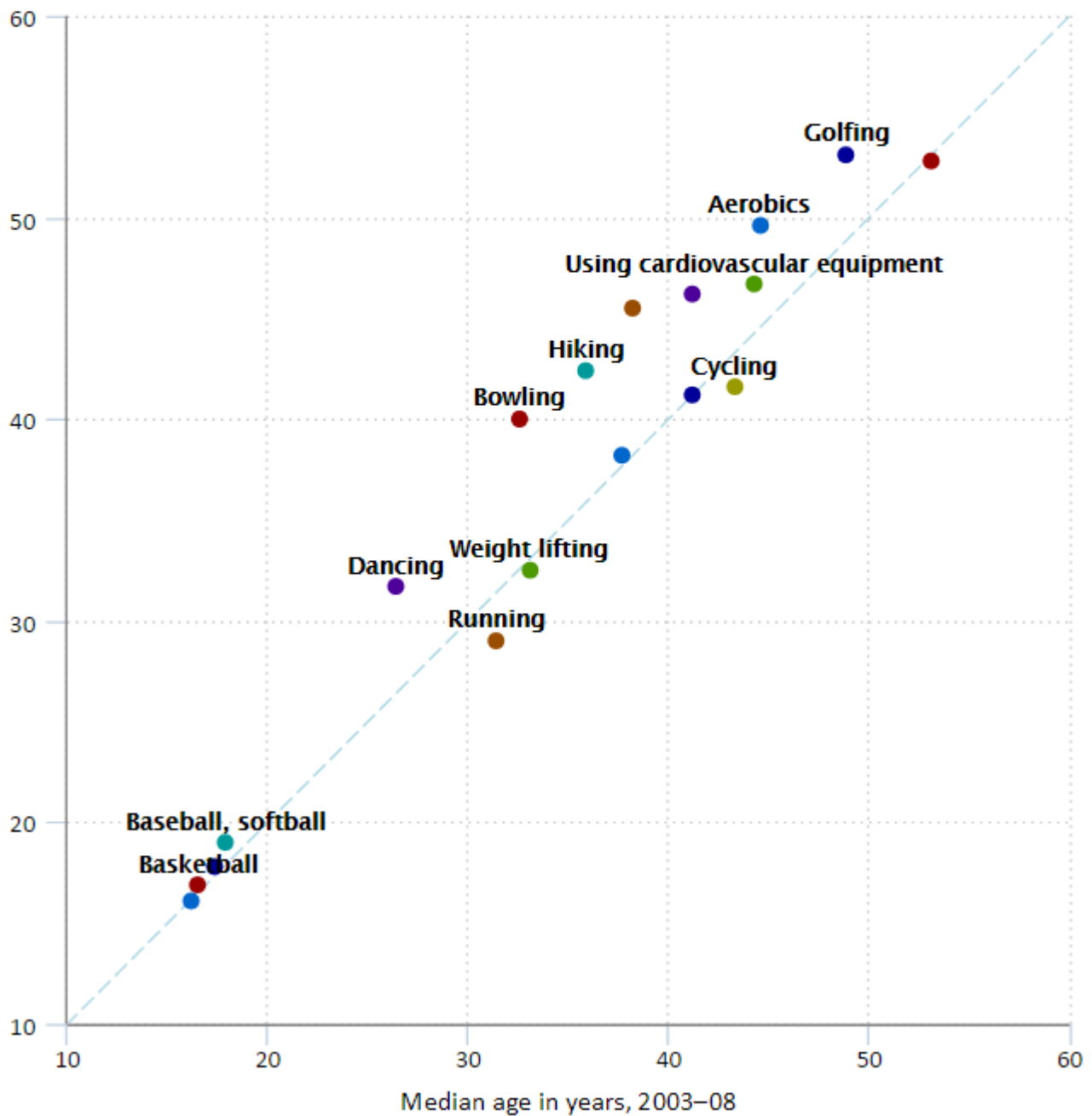
The median age of participants in many specific sports and exercise activities changed very little between 2003 to 2008 and 2009 to 2015. However, the median age did increase for some sports and exercise activities between the two time periods: racquet sports, hiking, golfing, and using cardiovascular equipment saw significant increases in the median ages of participants, ranging from 2.4 years (cardiovascular equipment) to 7.3 years (racquet sports).

Median age of participants in sports and exercise in 2009–15 compared to 2003–08



- Golfing
- Using cardiovascular equipment
- Hiking
- Bowling
- Dancing
- Soccer
- Walking
- Yoga
- Cycling
- Swimming, surfing, water skiing
- Running
- Basketball
- Aerobics
- Racquet sports
- Sports, total
- Weight lifting
- Baseball, softball
- Football

Median age in years, 2009–15



Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.



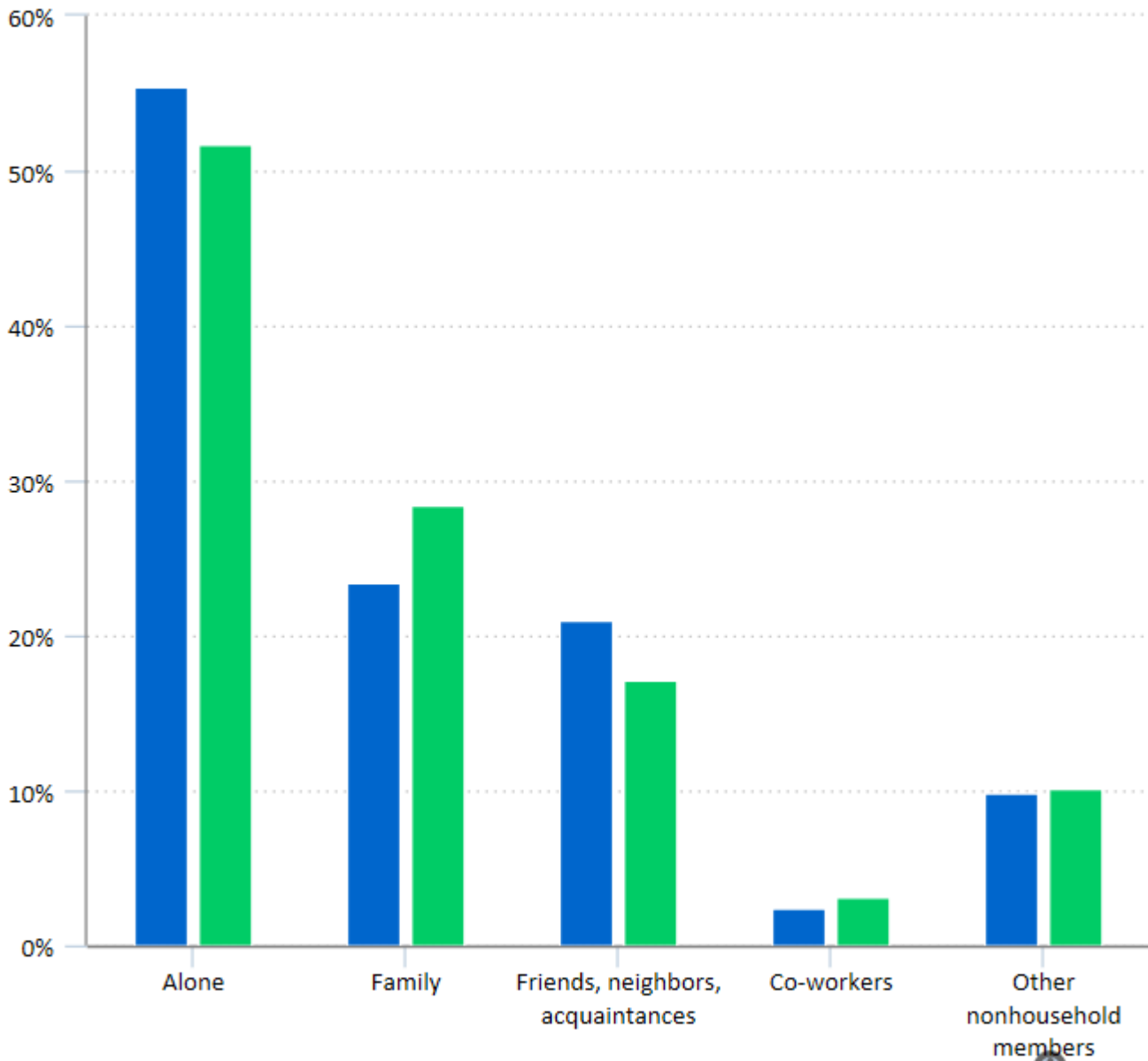
Companions during Sports and Exercise Activities

People were more likely to exercise alone than with someone they knew. Of those who participated in a sports or exercise activity on a given day, over half were alone when they did so. This was true for both men and women in 2009 to 2015. Women were more likely than men were to participate in sports or exercise with family members while men were more likely than women were to engage in these activities with friends, neighbors, or acquaintances. (Note: the percentages for men and women sum to more than 100 percent because people may engage in these activities with more than one person, and they may engage in these activities more than once in a given day.)

Percentage of people who engaged in sports and exercise on an average day, by sex, presence of others



Men, 2003-08 Women, 2003-08 Men, 2009-15 Women, 2009-15

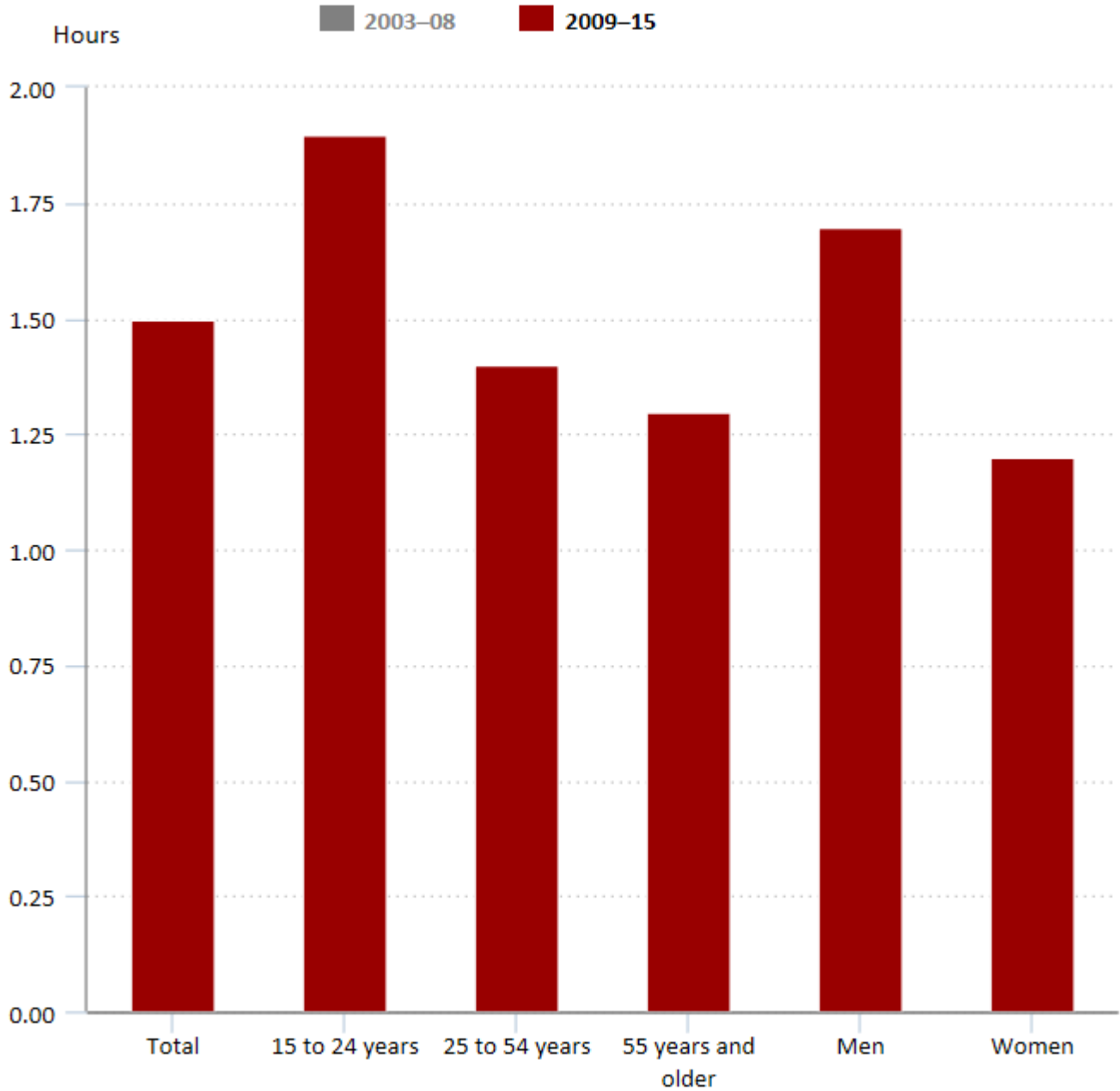


Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Time Spent Exercising and Playing Sports by Age and Sex

In 2009 to 2015, on days they engaged in sports or exercise activities, people aged 15 years and older spent an average of 1.5 hours in these activities. Men spent more time participating in sports or exercise activities than did women—1.7 hours, compared with 1.2 hours. On days they participated, those aged 15 to 24 years spent an average of 1.9 hours in sports and exercise activities, compared with 1.4 hours for those aged 24 to 54 years and 1.3 hours for those aged 55 years and over.

Average hours that people who engaged in sports and exercise activities on an average day spent doing them, by age group and sex



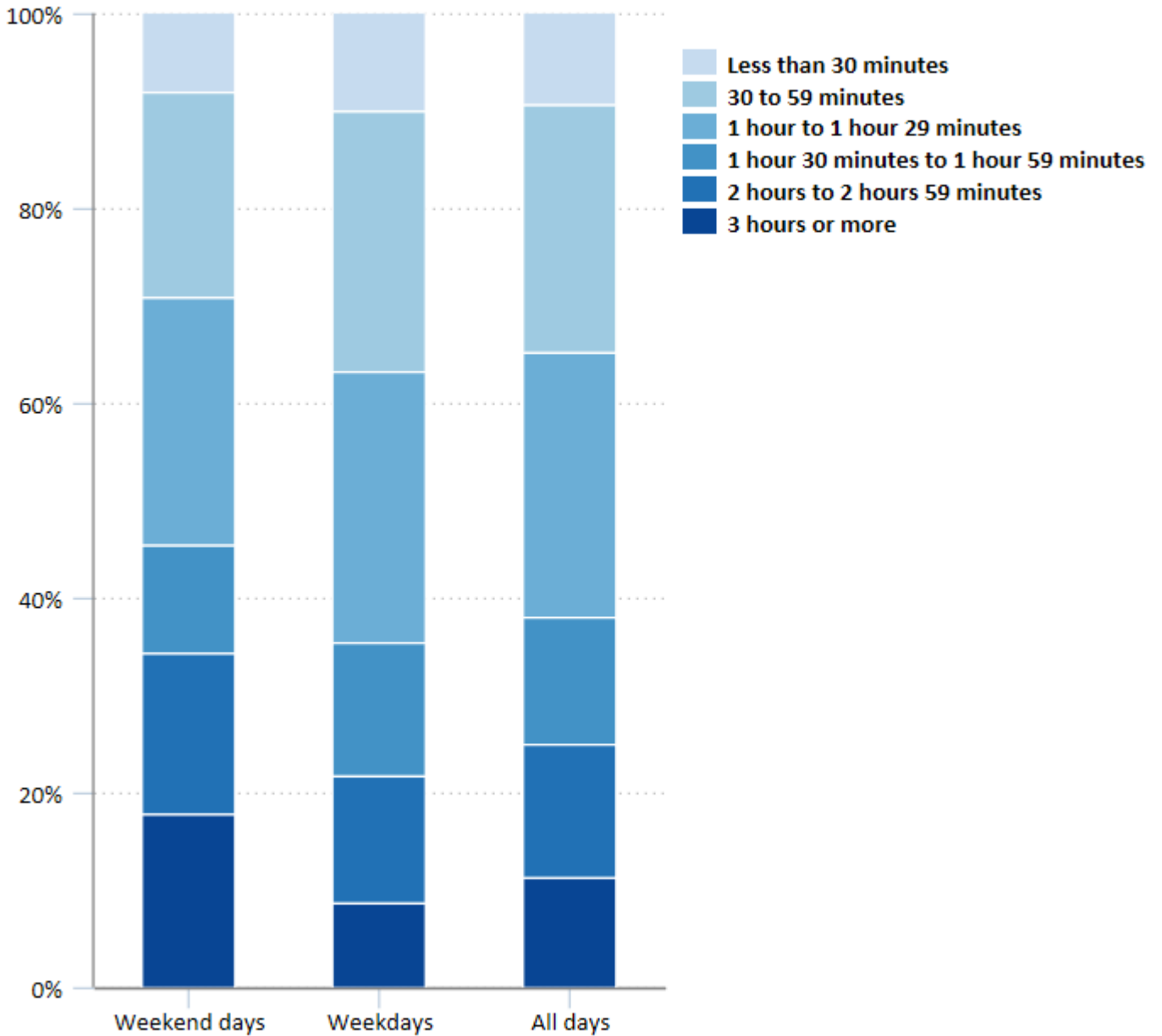
Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.



Time Spent Exercising — Weekdays and Weekend days

In 2009 to 2015, those who participated in sports and exercise activities spent more time doing these activities on an average weekend day (1.8 hours) compared with an average weekday (1.4 hours). Thirty-four percent of those who engaged in sports and exercise activities on weekend days, and 22 percent of those who participated on weekdays, spent two or more hours doing these activities.

Percent distribution by length of time spent exercising of people who engaged in sports and exercise activities on a given day, 2009–15



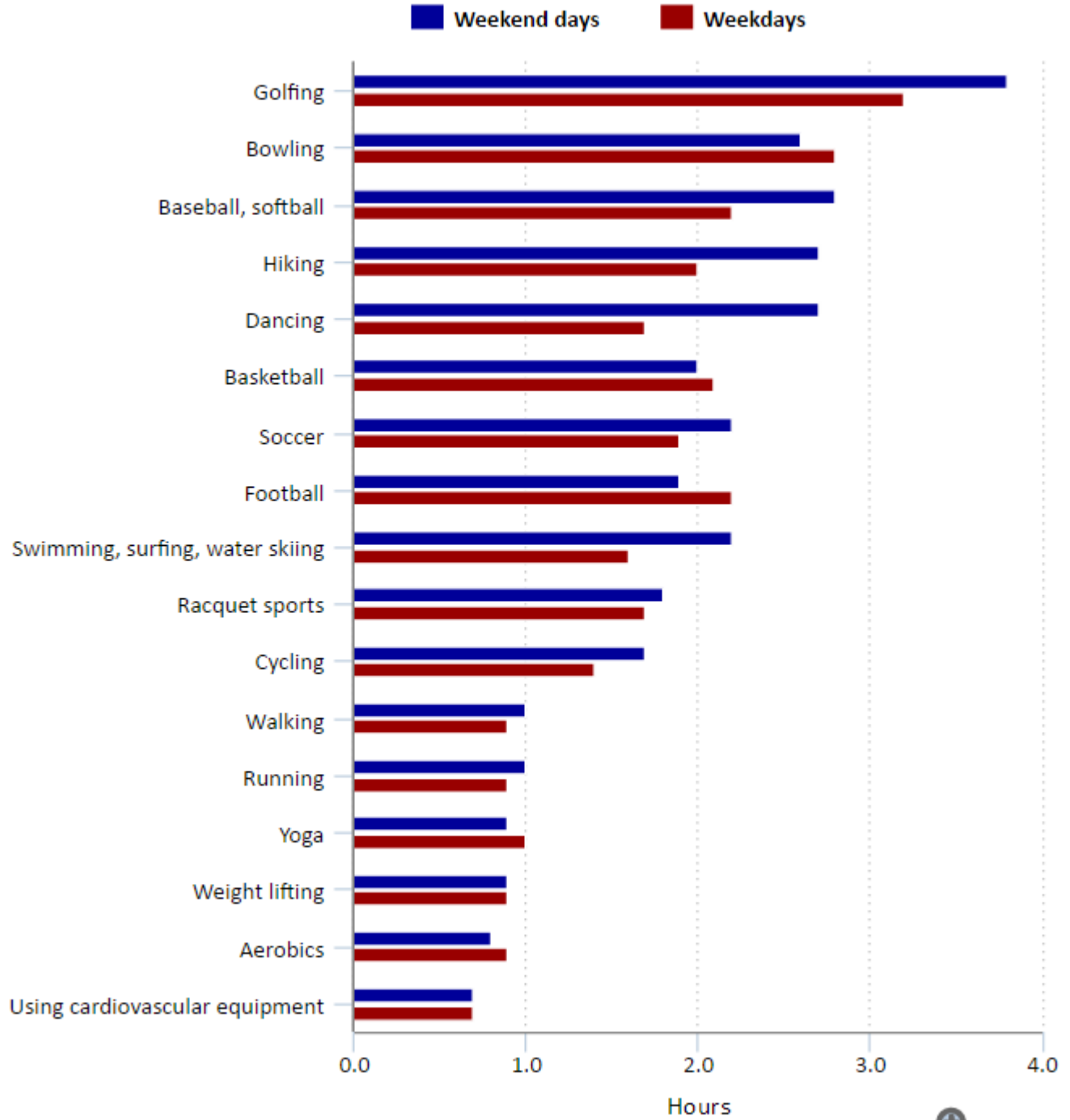
Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.



Time Spent in Selected Activities — Weekdays and Weekend Days

While people spent more time engaged in sports and exercise activities on weekend days than they did on weekdays, only some activities were associated with longer weekend hours. People who went dancing on the weekends spent an hour more doing so than those who danced on weekdays. More time was spent hiking on weekend days than weekdays—2.7 hours compared with 2.0 hours. People who played golf on the weekends spent 3.8 hours doing so compared with 3.2 hours for those who played on weekdays. Swimming, surfing, and water skiing; and playing baseball or softball also were associated with longer weekend times.

Average hours that people who engaged in sports and exercise activities on a given day spent engaged in the activity, weekdays and weekend days, 2009–15



Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
 Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.



Time of Day — When do People Exercise and Play Sports?

In 2009 to 2015, people were more likely to spend time exercising and playing sports later in the day; 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. was the most popular time to participate in sports and exercise, overall. On workdays, employed people aged 25 to 54 were more likely to engage in sports or exercise late in the afternoon or the early evening; early mornings were also a popular option. On non-workdays, employed people aged 25 to 54 were more likely to participate in sports and exercise activities throughout the middle of the day.

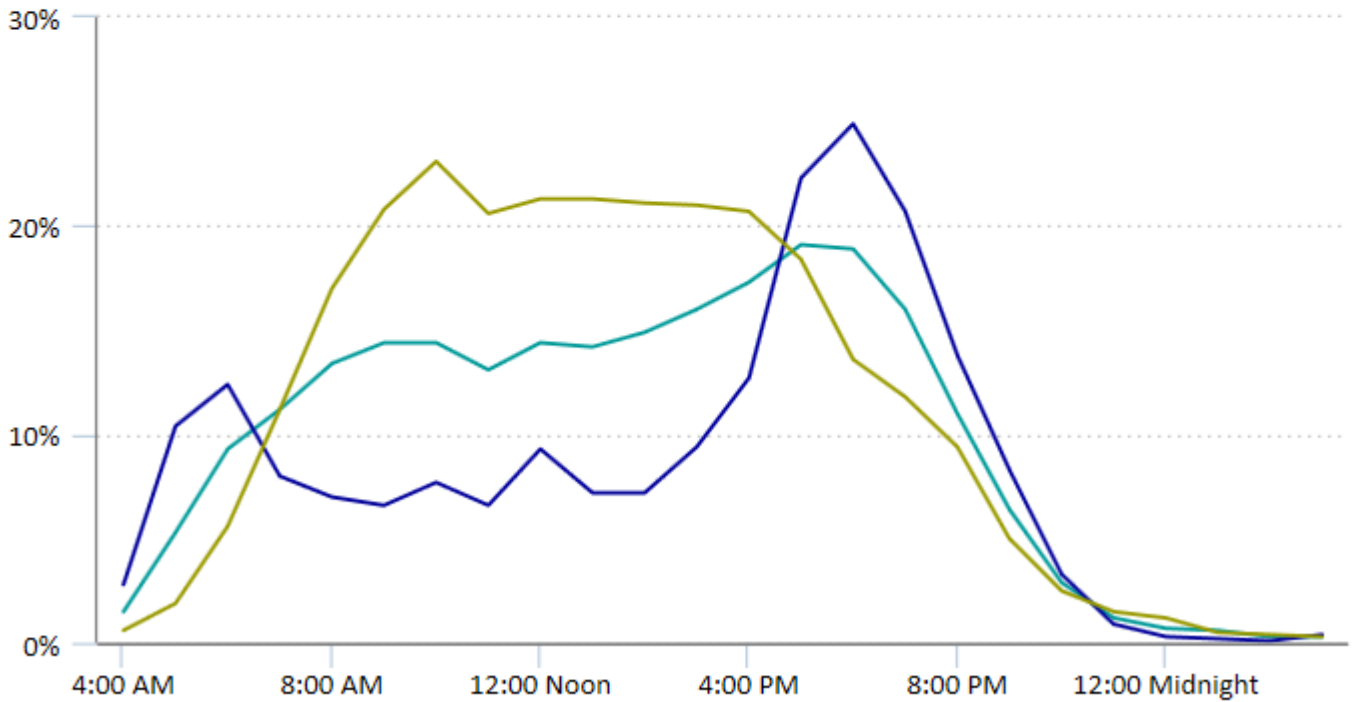
Men were more likely to participate in sports and exercise activities in the afternoon or early evening. Afternoon or early evening was also the most popular time for women to participate in sports and exercise, but morning was common as well.

People aged 15 to 24 were more likely to exercise later in the day; 30.0 percent of those aged 15 to 24 who participated in sports and exercise on a given day did so between 3:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. In contrast, those aged 55 years and over were more likely to participate in sports and exercise activities in the morning. Of those 55 years and over who engaged in sports and exercise, 20.7 percent engaged in these activities between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m.

On the weekends, the middle of the day was the most popular time to participate in sports and exercise activities. On weekdays, people who participated in sports and exercise activities were more likely to do so in the late afternoon and early evening. (Note: the percentages associated with each time refer to the hour-long interval that begins at that time. For example, the percentages associated with 6:00 a.m. include people who participated in sports and exercise anytime in the interval from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m.)

Percentage of people who engaged in sports and exercise on a given day, by hour of day when exercising, 2009–15

- Total
- Men
- Women
- 15 to 24 years
- 25 to 54 years
- 55 years and older
- Employed (aged 25 to 54), workday
- Employed (aged 25 to 54), non-workday
- Weekend day
- Weekday

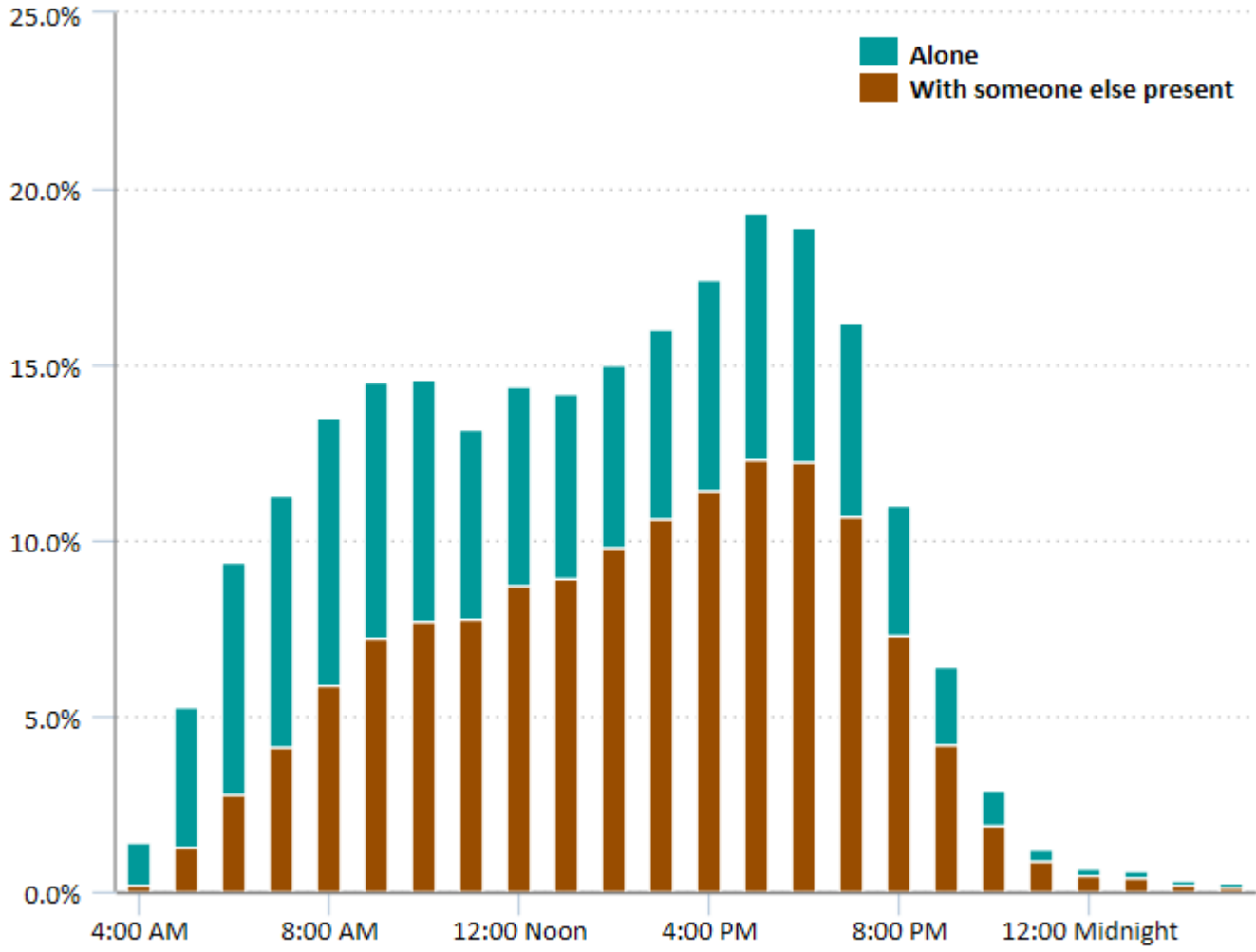


Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.
 Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Time of Day — Who are People With When They Exercise and Play Sports?

People were more likely to spend time exercising and playing sports later in the day. They also were more likely to spend time exercising with someone they knew in the afternoon and early evening. Of those who engaged in sports and exercise activities, 12.3 percent did so with someone else between 5:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m., while 7.0 percent did so alone during that same time interval. Mornings were less popular than early evenings, and people who exercised alone accounted for a larger share of those who participated in these activities during the early morning hours. (Note: the percentages associated with each time refer to the hour-long interval that begins at that time. For example, the percentages associated with 6:00 a.m. include people who participated in sports and exercise anytime in the interval from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m.)

Percentage of people who engaged in sports and exercise on a given day, alone or with someone else present, by hour of day, 2009–15



Click legend items to change data display. Hover over chart to view data.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

More information

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The American Time Use Survey (ATUS), which is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), is a continuous survey about how individuals age 15 and over spend their time. In the ATUS interview, survey respondents report activities they did between 4 a.m. on the day before the interview until 4 a.m. on the day of the interview. Interviews are conducted on all 7 days of the week. More information about the ATUS is available at www.bls.gov/tus.

The average day measure reflects an average distribution across all persons in the reference population and all days of the week. The participation rate per day for a population is computed using all responses from a given sample of the population, including those of respondents who did not do a particular activity on their diary day. The average number of hours per day for persons who did the activity is computed using only the responses from those who engaged in a particular activity on their diary day.

In this Spotlight, all activities classified as ATUS activity code 1301, *Participating in Sports, Exercise, or Recreation* are included except: billiards, fishing, hunting, boating, and vehicle touring.

Some estimates use data collected from multiple years, as data from a single year often do not provide the reliability required for publication. This Spotlight uses data collected from 2009 to 2015 for many of these charts. For comparisons with earlier periods, data from 2003 to 2008 are combined to construct estimates.

Unless otherwise stated, estimates include those aged 15 and older.

More information on participation in Sports and Exercise activities is available in [Sports and Exercise](#), Spotlight on Statistics, May 2008.