

Quotations on Physical Activity



*Quotations from life stories related to physical activity
shared by adults in rural Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming*
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Quotations collected from one-on-one interviews and focus groups conducted in Lewistown, Montana; Preston, Idaho; and Powell, Wyoming; March/April 2002

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Wellness IN the Rockies (WIN the Rockies) is a community-based research, intervention and outreach project that seeks to improve people's health in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. The philosophy of the project is that people have responsibility for their own health, but communities have responsibility for helping create environments that foster good health and provide healthy options.

The qualitative research phase of the project included the collection of narratives or life stories related to physical activity, food and eating, and body image from 103 adults in three rural communities. The interview team conducted 56 one-on-one interviews with 29 women and 27 men, and six focus groups with 28 women and 19 men. Interviewees ranged in age from 17 to nearly 90 years. The interviews and focus groups were recorded on cassette tapes, which were then transcribed. Over 55 hours of conversations were recorded, resulting in almost 2300 pages of transcripts. From the transcripts, the research team highlighted 1680 quotations that were then grouped and coded into 146 categories.

Our purpose in gathering the narratives was to elicit experiences that illustrate the challenges people have faced, the successes they have achieved, and the insights they have gained related to physical activity, food and eating, and body image. Our goal is for these stories to guide future educational efforts and help make these efforts more meaningful and relevant. We hope to help people make lasting changes to improve their health.

Barrier: Weather/Seasons

“I kind of hibernate in the wintertime. . . . I have for years.” *Male, mid 50's*



Barrier: Time

“I, like everybody probably, [have] gone through periods when I didn’t do much . . . physical activity—taken a demanding job and didn’t have as much time and I got bigger than I wanted to be and didn’t feel as good as I wanted to feel.” *Male in his 50's*

“I do like physical activity . . . but it’s just I think we get caught up in our own little world that we’re always too busy. We say, ‘Well we’re gonna do it,’ but we never get to it. It’s like, ‘Let’s put it off until tomorrow.’ Then you put it off tomorrow.” *Female, early 30's*

Barrier: Illness/Injury/Disability

“When I was a kid we walked a long ways to school. . . at least a mile and a half . . . and now I feel fortunate to get to this room.” *Female, mid to late 60's*

“I would still like to be able to do all the things I could forty years ago. . . . I don’t run no more at all. . . . And I still try to keep in some kind of shape to where I can do those things, especially with grand kids. But unfortunately the joints aren’t allowing it to happen.” *Male, 60ish*

Barrier: Pain/Discomfort

“Right now, I don’t like [physical activity] ’cause it hurts. . . . Yeah, it makes you feel better, but now it’s kind of like you *gotta* do it in order to keep yourself healthy as you get older. And it’s like there’s a difference between wanting to and knowing you *have* to do it.” *Female, late 40's*

“If I kick up that [physical] activity level, I know I’m going to be taking fists full of [pain] pills. So I don’t know. . . . I would love to do more.” *Male, mid 30's*

Barrier: Tired/Fatigued

“Well, [inactivity] kind of sneaked up on me. . . . You sit with your feet up and you do that for a while and, gee, it feels so good, you want to do it some more.” *Female in her 60's*

“I’m not in . . . good . . . shape, and so [physical activity] makes me realize how bad a shape I’m in. And it makes me tired more because I have to work harder.” *Female in her 30's*

“Most of my work has been desk work [and] it’s a challenge. . . . There’s a different kind of fatigue that comes from sitting behind a desk, but it’s still fatigue. So to get up after work and try and do something, . . . it’s a struggle.” *Female, 40ish*

Barrier: Fear of Injury/Safety

“Up here our hands are tied pretty much in the winter because . . . I don’t care much for the ice. I don’t want to re-injure [myself].” *Male in his 70's*

Barrier: Lack of Skills

“I never could participate in sports. . . . In PE, I was horrible. I used to fail physical education class because I wouldn’t go.” *Male, late 30's*

“[When] you would play baseball . . . or basketball and when you’re next to last always chosen because you’re uncoordinated, it definitely shapes your opinion for physical activities. . . . I remember coming up with tons of excuses why my mom had to write me a note because I hated PE.”

Female, 40ish

Barrier: Teasing/Criticism

“When I was about six years old, I remember my mother signing me up for tap dance lessons. After about three months I remember *so clearly*, the dance teacher came over to my mother and she said, ‘You’ve wasted *my* time and *your* money long enough. She is so clumsy you might as well not bring her back.’ . . . So that reinforced the fact that I’m this . . . *clumsy child* and so I just went into a mode of not doing *anything* that reinforced that image to myself or anyone else.” *Female, 60ish*

Barrier: Self-consciousness

“If I can exercise alone then I’m a lot happier. . . . I think I’m embarrassed to do things with people in case I can’t do it. Or I can’t keep up; then it makes [me] feel inferior and I’m not into that either.”

Male in his 40's

“The negative aspect [with physical activity] for me . . . is the *group*. . . . The loudest voice that’s inside of you, is people’s perception. . . . I tried to get into yoga, but didn’t feel comfortable. . . . Even though I could keep telling myself, ‘You’re a *beginner*, you’re not going to *know* how to do it well.’ I’d rather go home, and [exercise] on my own than to be embarrassed, or *perceived* to be embarrassed in front of a group.” *Female, early 40's*



Barrier: Boring/Not enjoyable

“A year ago my wife and kids gave me a year subscription to the gym and I’d go up there in the mornings and . . . it was like a rat in a cage. . . . To me that was just too boring . . . and everybody is panting so hard you don’t want to visit anyways. . . . To me it’s just kind of staring at a wall. . . . I just didn’t like it. . . . It . . . just wasn’t that fun.” *Male in his 50's*

“[I won’t walk on my own], I think, because I get bored. . . . I went to [a circuit gym], . . . and I enjoyed that ’cause [there] was music. . . . But it got boring, too. I was doing good at that and had lost some weight and was stronger, but I just—I got bored.” *Female, early 40's*

Barrier: No results

“If I do [physical activity] because I [want to] lose weight and I don’t lose weight, then I would feel like I have failed. If I would do it so that I could become physically fit—to the dogs with the other part—I think I could feel much better about that. But I don’t know that I’m at that point.”

Female, mid to late 40's

Barrier: No Support

“I didn’t have the greatest of marriages so I was really kind of isolated. . . . I could never get my husband to watch my babies for me to go do [physical activities] and so I think [that’s when physical activity] started being a negative connotation. And then I gained more weight. I see everybody on TV and they keep talking about [doing daily physical activity] and it’s like, ‘Easy for you to say, try living my life for a while.’ ” *Female, mid 30's*

Barrier: Vehicles

“I realize now that at my ripe old age of [over 50] if I’d have left the . . . car parked at the curb, or in the garage and did a lot of things with bicycle or walking [I’d be better off.] Vehicles make people lazy. They accomplish too many things for them.” *Male, mid 50's*

Barrier: Depression/Mental Health

“I was doing much better [with my regular walking program] and then last year, I got some bad . . . information about my son, and so I quit exercising. I quit walking. I quit doing everything.”

Female, early 40's

“When I got in my mid-thirties I started get[ting] some medical problems, kinda got negative about doing different things, depressed and stuff. And then I started getting out of shape from not doing nothing and then I kinda got [like I am] now.” *Male in his 40's*

Motivator: Friends/Others

“The one thing I know is that I can’t go, or won’t go walk by myself. So I’ve got to know that someone’s going to be waiting there for me, so that I will go.” *Female, early 40's*

Walking is good because then [my friend and I] can visit as we’re walking. . . . And I think part of that is . . . the motivation. You have somebody else to be accountable to with . . . walking.”

Female, late 40's



Motivator: Teamwork/Unity

“Probably the best lessons on commitment came from . . . sports, . . . that commitment not only to yourself, to improve, but . . . the commitment to the team effort. . . . And those are the [lessons] that I still carry today, for whatever team I might involve myself in, whether that would be work-group team or a sports team; those lessons came from the sports activities.” *Male, 30's to 40's*

Motivator: Enjoyment

“I’ll be real honest with you, I’m a recovered drug addict and alcoholic and been clean for [several] years, and the physical activity highs are far greater than any high I’ve ever had from any drug I’ve ever done. And I love it. . . . You get addicted to that feeling somewhat.” *Male, early 40's*

“I love to walk and so I try to walk three or four times a week. . . . It is very invigorating to me. . . . It is a pleasant experience. . . . I love to walk. . . . It’s my prayer time.” *Female in her 50's*

“And then I started running with [my sister] . . . probably because I saw the change in her. . . . I know that it made her happy, and emotionally it made her focus.” *Female in her 20's*

Motivator: Energy

“I was always the lazy little kid. I got something to show for that too, but I never really was into . . . exercise much when I was a little kid, . . . but what really changed my view point . . . was when I started going to the gym. I . . . found that you get more endurance, and you feel stronger, and you feel better . . . like . . . you don’t feel tired all the time. I mean you feel tired after you work out, but you don’t feel tired during the normal part of the day. So I like that.” *Male, early 20's*

“I [feel] better . . . more awake, *more energetic* . . . when I [do] something [physically active] each day, . . . *something* besides sitting at a desk.” *Female, 40ish*

Motivator: Sweat

“I don’t mind sweating. I like the perspiration, I mean dripping—and that sounds disgusting, but I like the *dripping*. You know, horrible dripping all over. My hair is disgusting, everything is dripping and you finish up [your workout] and you think, ‘*Oh my lord that was the worst thing I’ve ever done,*’ and then you shower and get ready for work and you feel good.” *Female, late 40’s*

Motivator: Strength/Fitness

“I would like to go back to when I was walking and doing [circuit training], how I was feeling then. Because even though I wasn’t measurably skinnier, I was in better shape. I had more physical strength. . . . And so I wish I was back just even where I was a year and a half ago. Well, I don’t know if I’ve got what it takes to get back there.” *Female, early 40’s*

“As [I] get older I begin to appreciate that . . . exercise is key to keeping your range of motion . . . functional.” *Male in his 50’s*



Motivator: Skills/Physical Abilities

“I’ve made a strong effort . . . to haul hay with the family and . . . we do it the old way, by hand. And I’ve enjoyed that because it’s helped me build up my shoulder strength. . . . And it’s given me a little bit more self-esteem to know that I do have the strength in my shoulders to take care of what needs to be taken care of.” *Male, early 50’s*

Motivator: Productive/Accomplishment

“That . . . regimented kind of physical activity, I’d rather have my physical activity actually accomplishing something . . . sheet rocking, carpentry, . . . stacking hay bales, that kind of work as opposed to going to the gym and pumping iron. . . . I think that is why the [exercise] machine is sitting there inactive.” *Male, mid 50’s*

“[Basic training for the military] was really, really hard, but I was really proud of myself too when I got it all done. That’s probably the thing that I can think of that made me kind of enjoy [physical activity] now. You know, there’s some purpose to it, instead of making me miserable.”

Female, mid 30’s

Motivator: Health/Prevention

“When you go to the doctor’s office and you fill out that family history, that can be pretty much a good indicator that you better start changing. . . . The doctors usually roll their eyes at me. . . . I mean, mother’s side of the family — high blood pressure, diabetes, heart problems, you name it, [it’s] pretty much there. On my father’s side, three different types of cancers, cholesterol problems. . . . I’ve lost both my parents and I’m [only in my 40’s]. Siblings are starting to run into serious health problems, but definitely [I’ve gained an] . . . awareness . . . of [mortality].” *Female, early 40’s*

“I’m basically healthy. My lungs are good, my heart’s good They’re sluggish because I don’t get any physical activity. I’m almost at the threshold of an unhealthy body. . . . I look at my mother and she is a complete . . . prisoner in her body. . . . I can foresee if I do not do something at some point in the near future, I’m going to be that [prisoner] also.” *Female, mid to late 40’s*

Motivator: Anti-aging

“I’m not going to get old gracefully. . . . I see people who give up their physical activity at an early age and then they are never able to enjoy the things which are available to us. So I’m not going to go down without fighting. . . . When my wife and I reach the *golden years*, [I want to] be physically fit so we can enjoy our lives. I see too many people that once they reach a certain age, their whole social life . . . is based around their doctor appointments and that’s sad. . . . And so I think you’re better off to stay physical[ly fit].” *Male, early 40’s*

Motivator: Mental Health/Emotions

“I can be depressed or down, especially since my husband died, and a couple of times I’ve talked myself into just getting up and going out and going for a walk. And I do that, and I come back, and I have a whole different outlook. I’m fine! I’ve lost the depression, or loneliness, or whatever it is. . . . Just get off the couch and get outside and get out the door.” *Female in her 60’s*

“When I go running I use it just to clear my head. It is *my* time to think, and there’s no *phones*, no *kids*; I don’t have to worry about homework. It’s just me and that fresh morning air.” *Female, late 40’s*

“I’ve grown to appreciate [physical activity] more, not only for what it does for the body, but kind of what it does for the sense of well-being. You just have more peace.” *Male, early 30’s*

Motivator: Self-confidence/Self-esteem

“I felt better about myself [when I was more physically active]. My self-esteem was quite a bit better. . . . I guess it’s one of those things that feeds on itself. You do a little bit of it and you feel better so you do more of it and you feel better. And in retrospective of that, I’ve sort of lost interest in physical activity, and it’s almost the opposite way. The less I do, the less I want to do.”

Male in his 40’s

“I started working out on a daily basis. . . . It’s just boosted my self-esteem, and I feel so much *better* about myself.” *Female, mid 20’s*



Motivator: Appearance

“I notice there’s a difference [if I’m not working out], not so much my weight, but you can tell the clothes are tighter, because things are floppier.” *Female, late 40’s*

Motivator: Weight Control

“I’m one of the guys that [has] no physical control relative to eating things. So I have to fill in the other side of the equation which is I just have to get enough exercise so I stay in weight and feel good about myself.” *Male in his 50’s*

“[There was] a period [of] time there where . . . without fail, I was going to be [at the gym] for my hour and nothing would stop me. . . . And I didn’t have the outcome that I thought I would have, losing the twenty or thirty pounds I was hoping to lose.” *Female, 40ish*

“To be honest, a lot of [encouraging physical activity for my kids is] not wanting to see them get overweight because you miss out on a few things [when you’re overweight].” *Male, early 30’s*

Motivator: Outdoors

“I like to hunt and go fishing and things like that, but to go lift weights or run [on] a treadmill, . . . I don’t particularly care for that. . . . I would walk all day in the hills if I was hunting . . . but to just go out and do it to be doing it . . . —it’s been a real struggle for me. That’s probably why I’m like I am.”

Male in his 60's

“When I go running, . . . it’s just me and that fresh morning air . . . and I enjoy that peace.”

Female, late 40's

“[When it comes to physical activities, I like] fishing and snowmobiling, and outdoor things. . . . It defines who I am. I feel I’m an outdoors kind of guy. That’s why I go to work in the morning and work all week so [I] have money to do those kind of things.” *Male in his 20's*

Motivator: Feels better after

“The truth of the matter is . . . I don’t enjoy running . . . while I’m doing it. I enjoy the benefits of running. . . . But most runs . . . when I finish, I am tired, and ah gosh, ‘I’m glad I got through that one.’ . . . I get a runner’s high but it’s after I run.” *Male in his 50's*

“As far as going to the gym, I don’t actually look forward to it. I know when I go I feel better afterward.” *Female, early 20's*



Motivator: Solitude/Time for Self

“When I go running, I use it just to clear my head. It is *my* time to think. . . . Sometimes I may have a serious issue in my life that I need to sort out without anybody around. And so I work through it.”

Female, late 40's

Attitudes

“I think I got to get my body to go with my brain. Because I know the benefits [of physical activity]. I also know that’s why I should [do it]. I also know what will happen if I don’t, and so I think it’s a matter of doing it. . . . You know my mind is there. My will is probably half there, three-quarters there, and my body is just apparently waiting for me to do it.” *Male, early 30's*

“I have a [relative] and she is *so* exercise crazy, and she’s skinny, but she spends a whole lot of time exercising and I think it’s a big waste of time to do that much.” *Female, mid 40's*

“[Physical activity is] stuff I don’t do a lot of. . . . It’s one of those things that I have good intentions of doing, and see myself doing, and it’s so easy not to do it.” *Female in her 30's*

“I think I always do like the birthday thing. . . . You start out and you think, ‘Oh, you know here comes another year, I need to do something’ and then I kind of start-start and fizzle-fizzle.”

Female, mid to late 40's

Discipline/Motivation

“[Walking] feels good to do it. One problem I have is I’m not a very disciplined person. And so if something else comes in the way . . . I can easily abandon [walking]. I mean, it takes time, it takes commitment. I have a reasonably busy life. . . . I can put [walking] off where I don’t put off other things.” *Female, mid to late 40's*

“[My current level of physical activity] is poor. I could probably improve greatly. . . . I know I need to improve. . . . I don’t know how dedicated I am.” *Male in his 40's*

Priority/Balance

“I sit too much. I know that. I love to read and sew, and as a result I don’t get out and moving enough, and I’m feeling it physically. I realize the muscle strength is not there, [but] recognizing that you need to do something about it is one thing, doing it is another.” *Female, late 40's*

“At my house, . . . when we were old enough to work, we had to go find a job. And so in our house growing up, *work* was more important than the physical [activity]. . . . And I think that’s what I still play in my head today is I first have to take care of my family and my job and if I *have* time to do . . . physical activity, that’s great. But these other things are much, much higher on the priority list.” *Female in her 30's*

“I got a lot of things going in my life and [physical activity] is not on the priority list. And I’m probably not in as good as physical shape as a guy ought to be.” *Male, mid 50's*

Experiences from youth (including school and coaches)

“I had a hideous gym coach . . . once. . . . He was not a nice fellow. He hated fat people. He thought it was purely self-inflicted even though it turns out I actually had a . . . thyroid disorder. . . . He really hated fat people. And that was when I quit going to PE class all together and never went back.” *Male, late 30's*

“Running that mile in junior high, I will *always* remember . . . being the last one across the line. That wasn’t the most positive experience.” *Female in her 20's*

Sore Muscles

“[I like sore muscles] because it’s like, ‘Oh, they’re *awake* now. I do have muscles. They haven’t all turned to flab’ .” *Female, late 40's*



Extreme

“I have a daughter who could work out twenty-four hours a day and be totally happy.”

Female, mid to late 40's

Lingering Effects

“I never did like being last picked or never getting picked at all [for sport games growing up]. . . . It did lower my self-esteem in some ways because it made me feel like I wasn’t good. . . . So I think over the years of not being picked it kind of lowered my self-esteem, which has affected some of my other activities in life.” *Male, early 30's*

“I’ve broken both my ankles playing volleyball, so I can’t do that anymore.” *Female, late 20's*

Family

“We’ve always been kind of more poor or on a lower income side . . . and when I was between second and third grade my dad decided he would go off to [find work in another state] and when he left I guess . . . I didn’t do a lot. I missed my dad. So I kind of gained a little bit of weight there and kind of held it ever since.” *Male, early 30's*

“Mostly my [physical activity] motivator now is my son. . . . I feel that if I’m going to expect him to [be physically active] then I need to be an example. . . . I have really tried to make my attitude positive again for my son . . . because if I view it as a chore and a drag, then he’s not going to want to be part of that either, and so I’ve tried to really keep my attitude up so that I can help him to stay positive about it.” *Female in her 30’s*

Personality

“I just taught ten P.E. classes today. I ran with my track team . . . and then I just taught an aerobics class. . . . I am so type A [personality]. . . . I’m not like my family, . . . and it’s hard ’cause my family . . . —they aren’t as active as I am and it drives them crazy that I’m this way.” *Female, late 20’s*

Competition

“When I’m in competition, I’m willing to exert a lot more than just standing on a treadmill running. . . . You don’t really recognize that you’re exercising when you’re in competition. . . . It’s enjoyable because you are focusing on a game.” *Male in his 30’s*

“It was more of a *rush* to me to race against somebody because I always wanted to beat them. . . . It was that feeling of excitement . . . when you know that you did really, really good.” *Female, mid 20’s*

“Sometimes [playing a sport] gets more competitive than . . . I think it should, . . . and it gets a little complicated . . . because [someone’s] skill level isn’t any better than anybody else, but that person wants to tell everybody else how to play or what to do . . . and it just gets frustrating .” *Male, 30ish*

Age

“Fifty-five [was a tough birthday.] I think it’s just in my head, . . . ‘Am I over the hill?’ But then I talk to other people, . . . retired people, and they . . . look good. . . . So I get on this guilt trip that I should start taking better care [of myself].” *Male, mid 50’s*

“When you get a few years on you, when you stop and look at things seriously that you’re going to get slower, you better get all the life you can now because . . . [when] you’re eighty years old you can see how people slow down. So I want to enjoy my physical activity . . . and enjoy life as much as I can. . . . Enjoy life so you’ve got some memories that you did make the best of your life.” *Male, 70ish*

Gender

“My husband is on his feet all day, turning wrenches, doing these things. I sit at my desk eight hours. He comes home, he’s ready to rest and I probably need to come home and go turn wrenches for awhile. We need to switch roles. . . . We have different kinds of exhaustion when we get home.” *Female in her 30’s*

“[In high school], there were all these short jokes, even with people I ran around with. . . . I always felt it would be nice to be bigger, just from the standpoint of not being picked on. . . . ’Cause I would be sick to my stomach to go to school.” *Male in his 30’s*



Strenuous

“After my heart attack, [my wife and I] got into some cardiac therapy under a controlled set of exercises three times a week. . . . When we are out for our evening walks . . . we [walk at a more leisurely pace.]” *Male in his 70’s*

“I enjoy different things now, less strenuous things. Like now I prefer golf to jogging.” *Male in his 30's*

Facilities/Equipment

“I have a stationary bike in my bedroom, *but* it [has] sat there for two weeks, [and] I haven't even been on it, so [I should] hang clothes on it or something.” *Female, late 40's*

“I like recreation programs that they have for kids. I think this town does an excellent job in that category. . . . I'm not sure that there couldn't be more physical education classes for older people.”

Male, mid 70's

“It seems to me that the whole idea . . . is that you really got to . . . as a community say ‘*People are different.*’ You can't just offer two racquet ball courts . . . and say that's good enough. . . . You've got to offer swimming. You've got to offer softball. You've got to offer a lot of stuff.” *Male, 30ish*

Media

“You see so much about exercise on TV. You see all these different things on TV about different systems and all this equipment and all these things that you can buy to get you in shape. And they've got so many things out there that they're throwing at our society to make people think that they need to be using their stuff to get in shape. You know it's a big business. There's a lot of people making a lot of money selling stuff that people end up storing in the basement.” *Male in his 30's*

Smoking

“I quit smoking when I was probably 20. I smoked almost four packs a day. I was in the military and it just got to the point . . . where I couldn't hardly breathe. . . . And then after that I have just been relatively healthy the rest of my life because I could see the difference of what, like smoking for example, could do.” *Male, late 50's*

Work/Occupation

“My work . . . offers [any] one of the three health clubs, [and] if you go as a family, they'll pay . . . the fee . . . because they *believe* in wellness for their employees.” *Female, early 40's*

Medical

“My doctor said I need more [physical activity]. . . . I suppose I do, but there's always something going on that I can't fit it in.” *Female, 40ish*

“I've got a little heart problem, and . . . if I'm going to take care of this heart problem, I need to get off the old couch.” *Male, mid 50's*



Other environmental - Changes in society

“I think our culture has changed so much that we are becoming a more sedentary type people. And I see . . . kids and the kind of activities they are involved with, whether it's video games or whatever, that require just minimal motion and activity. . . . We're not generating much interest in being active at an early age and I think that converts right into . . . adulthood. And if [children] never learned the joys of being active and being fit, I don't think you [can] create that in them.” *Male, early 40's*