

Natural England Commissioned Report NECR068

Walking for Health: ‘inactive’ walkers – barriers to participation, and activity substitution

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Foreword

Natural England commission a range of reports from external contractors to provide evidence and advice to assist us in delivering our duties. The views in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of Natural England.

Background

When Walking for Health was launched in 2000 walking was not considered a serious form of exercise. Now the health benefits of short, regular, brisk walks are widely understood. The Department of Health considers that health walks can be a way of increasing people's levels of physical activity and improving their health.

In 2007, Department of Health and Natural England working in partnership with local statutory and voluntary organisations took the decision to invest in an expansion of Walking for Health as part of the package of public health initiatives aimed at getting people more active.

As part of the Walking for Health expansion a programme of evaluation was established. The aims of the programme were to evaluate, quantitatively and qualitatively, both health and environmental outcomes from the Walking for Health intervention. To deliver the breadth and depth of evaluation Natural England has worked with research and academic partners.

This report is part of a package of work commissioned through Ipsos MORI examining the impacts of Walking for Health on physical activity. This report presents research on people who had stopped participating in led health walks. Using a mixed method approach, this research explores the barriers to participation and the range of other activities that people participate in.

The results of this work provide a useful insight into people that get involved with Walking for Health. Key lessons are drawn out at the end of the report that may help local organisations delivering led walks to increase retention and participation. The results have wider applicability to engaging people with local green spaces and the person barriers that need to be considered.

The purpose of Natural England commissioning this study was increase our understanding of the personal decision making that influences the use of green space. This study adds to the evidence in this respects and Natural England will use their findings to inform and support communities in the development of green spaces where they can engage with their natural environments.

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The logo for Ipsos MORI, with 'Ipsos' in a blue sans-serif font and 'MORI' in a larger, bold, blue sans-serif font.

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Further information

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Summary

This report presents research findings on why people who were registered for with the Walking for Health scheme have dropped out of the scheme, and what if anything they are doing instead. It also examines their experiences of Walking for Health (WfH) to determine if there are any barriers that can be removed to encourage people to continue on with the scheme.

The research audience was people classified as 'inactive' according to the Walking for Health database held by Natural England (specifically, those who had no recorded walk participation for six months or more). The research comprised of 20 in-depth interviews and a telephone survey of 2,624 interviews.

The vast majority of respondents from the in-depth interviews enjoyed their WfH walk(s) and were positive about the scheme as a whole. The main reasons for no longer participating in WfH were found to be deterioration in health, mainly the case for older participants, and a lack of time. This was the case for both the in-depth interviews and the telephone survey.

Respondents were asked what forms of physical activity, if any, they participated in apart from WfH. Again the most common response across the in-depth interviews and telephone survey was walking informally with friends and family, followed by gym and swimming. Responses from the telephone survey indicate a positive effect of WfH; nearly two thirds (64%) felt WfH had encouraged them to participate in physical activities.

While WfH does not seem to engender an appreciation of the natural environment where it does not already exist, evidence from the in depth interviews indicates that WfH deepens pleasure and increases awareness of natural beauty in local areas.

Several suggestions were made as to how to increase participation in WfH. Advertising in GPs' surgeries and recommendations from doctors was mentioned by a number of respondents during the in-depth interviews which indicates this is a suitable method of raising awareness of the WfH scheme. Participants should also be encouraged to invite along friends and family.

It is concluded that WfH is a positive scheme that encourages people to become more active. For those who are already active but have specific health problems preventing them from continuing with their previous levels of activity, WfH provides a 'step up' or a 'step down'; a 'step up' for those recovering from health problems or a 'step down' for those who used to be active and with declining health.

Acknowledgements

Ipsos MORI and Natural England would like to acknowledge and thank all those people that had previously taken part in Walking for Health walks and gave their time to contribute to this research. We would also like to thank all those local schemes who have contributed to and maintained information on the Walking for Health database on which this research drew heavily.

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1. Background, Objectives and Method

1.1 Background

Natural England and the Department of Health, working in partnership with local scheme deliverers have been seeking to expand the participation in the Walking for Health (WfH) initiative. In taking this forward the national partners aim to: help people to enjoy the countryside; and encourage them to improve their health.

It is particularly targeted at those who currently struggle to achieve the NHS recommendation of participation in 30 minutes of moderate physical activity (i.e. enough to raise the heart rate above normal levels) at least five times per week.

Ipsos MORI's Active People survey shows that the proportion achieving the minimum weekly recommended level of activity falls to 16% for those aged 55-64, and 12% for those aged 65-74. The Walking for Health (WfH) scheme is largely targeted at helping those aged 65+ (including those with health problems) become more active, by encouraging them to take part in gentle exercise. Indeed a third (29%) of those registered on the WfH database are aged 65-74, and a further 9% are aged 75+.

Natural England and the Department of Health are aiming to achieve a four-fold expansion in participation in WfH by March 2012. Specifically, their aim is to have 130,000 participants per week and to render 200,000 sedentary adults 'physically active' (defined as 30 minutes of moderate physical activity three times per week) by 31st March 2012.

Part of realising these aims involves the creation of a database, detailing the demographic characteristics of those who have participated in WfH, their levels of physical activity, and their levels of participation in WfH walks. The database was created using an Outdoor Health Questionnaire, which is completed by walkers the first time they attend a walk. Walk leader volunteers then input the responses to the questionnaire into the database.

1.2 Research Aims

To ensure the goals are met, Natural England commissioned Ipsos MORI to monitor and evaluate WfH.

The aims of this research project were defined as follows:

- To establish whether participation in WfH leads to a sustained increase in physical activity
- To understand what the barriers are to participation in WfH

Parts of these aims are measured through a telephone survey with those on the WfH database, the results of which are detailed in other reports. This is a longitudinal study interviewing the same set of respondents four different times during the course of a year to understand how their walking patterns change over time. However, Ipsos MORI was also

commissioned to specifically research those who are classed as 'inactive' according to the WfH database. This was calculated as those who had not been on a walk in the period from 23rd December 2009 until 23rd May 2010 (6 months prior to the first wave of the telephone survey).

The research with inactive walkers involved 20 qualitative in depth interviews and a further set of questions on the telephone survey asked of 2624 respondents classed as 'inactive' from the WfH database.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 In-depth interviews

The qualitative stage of the research consisted of 20 depth interviews with inactive WfH walkers. Inactive walkers are defined as individuals who have participated in WfH in the past but have not been on a walk for at least six months. These interviews allowed a discussion of each respondent's experiences and perceptions of the WfH scheme, their reasons for no longer participating, barriers to participation, and steps that Natural England could take to encourage them to go on WfH walks in the future.

These interviews were conducted over the telephone. It was felt that this was more appropriate than face-to-face interviews as it provided a cost-effective way of reaching a geographically dispersed sample.

In recruiting the interviews loose quotas were set on sex, ethnicity, age and region. A profile of the in-depth interviews is presented below.

Table 1 Profile of In-Depth interview Recruits

Demographics	Interviews achieved	Quota
Gender		
Female	15	15
Male	5	5
Ethnicity		
White	18	18
BME	2	2
Age		
18-54	5	6
55-64	7	5
65-74	3	5
75+	3	2
Not disclosed	2	2
Region		
Living in East	2	2
Living in East Midlands	3	3
Living in North East	2	2
Living in North West	2	2
Living in South East	4	4
Living in South West	2	2
Living in West Midlands	3	3
Living in Yorks and Humber	2	2

The interviews were based around a discussion guide, which was drawn up by Ipsos MORI in consultation with Natural England. This can be found in Appendix A. The questions were largely open-ended and some contained 'probes' to help shape discussions.

The findings of the qualitative interviews were used to develop specific questions for inactive walkers for the telephone survey.

1.3.2 Telephone survey

The telephone survey was carried out between 13th September and 5th October 2010 – the second wave of the longitudinal study referred to above. Interviews were conducted using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). In total 6,695 walkers, both active and inactive, were contacted.

Quotas for the telephone survey were set based on the following criteria:

- Active/inactive walkers
- Age
- Sex
- Region

Where interviewers were unable to meet targets, due to a lack of eligible available contacts from the database, numbers of respondents were made up by conducting additional interviews in other target areas. Final results were then weighted to match regional and national profiles.

All respondents were asked the same question about their current levels of physical activity (as they were in wave one). In addition, 2,624 inactive walkers were also asked whether they had taken part in a WfH walk in the past six months, and if not, why they were no longer participating in the scheme and whether they had taken up any alternative forms of physical activity. This questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

It was found that a third (31%) of those classed as inactive had not taken part in a walk for at least six months and did not intend to in the foreseeable future; a quarter (24%) had not taken part in a walk for at least six months but intended to start again shortly and more than two fifths (45%) had in fact taken part in a WfH walk in the previous six months.

Those participants who had taken part in a WfH walk in the last six months were then excluded from the subsequent questions related to barriers for participation, and any subsequent activities which had been taken up.

This report presents findings from both the in-depth interviews and the telephone survey to provide a full picture of those who are classed as 'inactive' from the WfH database.

2. Main Findings

2.1 About the Respondents

To reflect the profile of the WfH database, the majority of respondents participating in the in-depth interviews were older people. These were mostly retired, and among the younger respondents interviewed there was one young mother and a small number of individuals who were either in or seeking employment. Participants lived in a mixture of households; some lived on their own and some lived with other people. There was also a great variety in the amount of time that respondents had lived in their area; some had lived there for decades, or even longer, while others moved there just a few years ago.

When discussing what they do in their spare time, the majority of respondents described an active lifestyle. Common physical activities in which respondents participated include gardening, swimming and walking. These findings are consistent with those of the telephone survey which will be discussed in more detail (see section 2.6).

As well as being physically active, many respondents are also active citizens in their community, participating in organisations such as the Women's Institute, or volunteering.

I go swimming, I do quite a bit of walking, I belong to a handicraft group and the W.I.

Female, 65-74, North West

In addition to this, a large number of respondents said that the natural environment is important to them and that over the course of their lives they have had a high degree of interaction with it. This interaction often takes the form of walking and visiting stately homes and gardens.

I've always enjoyed walking...now I like visiting English gardens. In the summer they're just so lovely.

Female, 55-64, North East

It [the natural environment] has been an important part of my life. I went to parks a lot as a child and I've been on walking holidays in the Yorkshire Dales and the Peak District.

Male, Age Not Disclosed, South East

2.2 Routes to Walking for Health

2.2.1 Hearing about WfH

All respondents for the in-depth interviews remembered where they had first heard about WfH and cited a variety of sources of information.

The most common source mentioned was word-of-mouth and personal recommendation. Respondents were told about WfH by friends who had themselves been on a walk and in one instance heard about it through a family member who was involved in the scheme.

One of my W.I. ladies goes on them, and I said that when I was retired that I would go and join her and I did.

Female, 55-64, East of England

In addition to this, a number of respondents say that they first heard about the scheme in leaflets that they picked up. Such leaflets were normally found in GPs' surgeries and in local libraries, although some were also found at health and leisure centres. Reflecting the particular groups that the WfH initiative is targeting, two respondents said it was their doctor who told them about the scheme, and who suggested that they might benefit from taking part.

I went to the doctor's...and he said 'Do you fancy going on this thing?'

Female, 65-74, North West

A few respondents also said that they learnt about WfH from advertisements in the local press.

2.2.2 Deciding to participate in WfH

The majority of respondents say that they primarily decided to go upon a WfH walk for health reasons, specifically because they wanted to lose weight or thought that they needed to exercise more. A related reason for joining the scheme is that it was part of their recovery from an illness.

Firstly, walking's good for your health. I happen to have had a knee operation and I needed something to get me back into being outdoors, that wasn't too strenuous...It was basically for fitness.

Female, Age Not Disclosed, South East

For many respondents, the group structure of the walks played an important part in their decision to participate. A number of respondents say that they saw the walks as an opportunity to socialise, although it should be noted that this was often a secondary motivation and was mentioned by a variety of respondents, not just those living on their own.

I went for health reasons, but I also wanted some company.

Female, 55-64, North East

A few respondents also stated that they decided to go on a WfH walk specifically because they felt that walking with other people would motivate them to exercise. These respondents say that they dislike exercising by themselves but thought that it would be easier in a group.

An additional consideration for several female respondents was safety. These respondents said that they do not feel comfortable being out on their own, particularly if it is late or they are not close to home, and they thought that they would be safer walking as part of a group.

Safety was something of a consideration, especially when we were going further afield.

Female, 55-64, Yorkshire

Other reasons mentioned by respondents for deciding to participate included wanting to be in the fresh air, and an interest in exploring their local area.

While no respondents said that the fact that WfH is free was the primary reason for their participation, one respondent said that she did appreciate the fact that she did not have to pay, and that she felt that this was attractive to other walkers as well.

Not all respondents decided to participate in WfH for the same reasons; while many say they felt that group walks would offer a welcome opportunity to meet new people, one lady explicitly said that she was not particularly interested in this aspect of the experience. Rather, most respondents say that there were a variety of considerations behind their desire to join the scheme, and the above factors are present to different degrees and in different combinations in each response.

2.3 Experiences of Walking for Health

Respondents' experiences of the WfH scheme as a whole were overwhelmingly positive. All except one respondent said they enjoyed the walks, they were well-organised and that the scheme as a whole is very good.

There were no aspects of the walks that I didn't enjoy.

Male, 55-64, East Midlands

I don't think there's anything wrong with the scheme, I think it's great.

Female, 64-74, East of England

Expectations of the walk

Respondents described a variety of feelings and expectations prior to their first walk. Many respondents said that they felt that they had plenty of information about what to expect. This information was usually obtained from the leaflets that introduced them to WfH in the first instance. In addition to this, one female respondent said that there was a helpline provided on the leaflet which she rang in order to obtain more information about the walk.

However, a small minority of respondents say that they did not have very much information at all about the walks before they participated, and one respondent says that this was a source of apprehension for him.

I didn't have much information. I was a bit nervous because I didn't know what to expect.

Male, Age Not Disclosed, South East

Nervousness before their first walk was a feeling that was also experienced by one or two other respondents, who cited concerns about the length or difficulty of the walks and their ability to complete them. However, a large number said that they were looking forward to their walks.

Well, I was pleased to be doing something. I felt like I was in good hands.

Female, 55-64, Yorkshire

The majority said that they expected the other walkers to be similar to themselves, by which they usually meant older people who are retired and want to look after their health.

I thought they would be people like me, I suppose. It was mid-week so people with jobs couldn't go.

Male, 75+, South West

Experiences of the walks

Respondents said that that it was easy to find the location of the starting point of the walks, which was usually a prominent, central location, such as a local shopping centre or town hall. Although in some instances respondents said that they had to drive to the location of the walks, no respondent found accessing the starting points difficult.

It was easy [to find the location of the walk]...we met at the car park for the shopping centre. I knew where it was.

Female, 18-54 West Midlands

Most respondents said that they enjoyed the walks that they went on with the WfH programme and comment positively on the places where they walked and the scenery that they saw.

The majority of respondents went on more than one walk, and in general respondents felt that there was a sufficient degree of variety in the walks that their groups went on. However, a couple of people commented that the routes did not change frequently enough, and that did affect their enjoyment of the walks.

When considering the difficulty of the walks, the majority of respondents said that they found the walks easy and that they did not have any problems completing them. Despite this a few people said they found the walks a little difficult at first. Given the common use of WfH as a route back to health (see 2.2.2), or an opportunity to enhance fitness, it is perhaps unsurprising that some walkers should find the walks challenging, at least initially.

I found them a bit difficult at first. I wasn't used to walking for so long.

Female, 55-64, North East

In contrast to this, one respondent says that she found that the walks were a little too easy for her:

It wasn't really taxing enough for me, because I'm used to doing slightly longer and slightly harder walks.

Female, 75+, South West

The level of difficulty or ease with which participants completed the walks are cited as reasons for not continuing to participate in WfH walks (see section 2.4). However, the findings from the telephone survey show that these are mentioned by just 6% and 4% respectively. However, as acknowledged by many of the in-depth interviewees, it will always be challenging to meet everyone's needs when offering a service that is open to all – irrespective of their walking ability.

As has already been discussed, the group nature of the scheme was, for many participants, one of the major reasons that they decided to participate in WfH (see section 2.2.2). In the event, the majority of respondents said that they enjoyed walking in a group.

I really enjoyed walking with other people. The group really enhances the atmosphere of the walk.

Male, Age Not Disclosed, South East

However, for a small minority of respondents, the group structure was a cause for some concern prior to their first walk. In one case the issue was one of personality; the respondent was worried because he is not a naturally gregarious person and was therefore intimidated by the prospect of meeting a large number of new people. For several other respondents, the concern was that they might not like walking in a group, as it was not an experience that they were accustomed to.

The group nature of the walks is the cause of some mild criticisms of the WfH scheme. The potential difficulties of group walking, and the need to balance the differing needs and experiences of different walkers are highlighted by several respondents who say that other walkers were either too fast or too slow.

A further criticism of the group walks centres upon the walkers themselves. A minority of respondents said that they found that the walkers tend to gather in exclusive cliques, and that this could be intimidating and might affect their willingness to participate if they were not able to go along with a friend.

You tend to go when somebody else is going, it is a bit daunting when you first go along if you don't know anybody...Although people are very friendly, they're all in their little groups, so it's quite nice to have somebody you know and you want to talk to.

Female, 65-74, East of England

A large majority of respondents felt that the walk leaders were very good. They were seen as being organised, helpful and welcoming. In addition, many respondents commented positively on leaders' explanations of the walk, their first aid knowledge and the way in which

one leader always remains at the back of the group with those participants who do not wish to walk too fast. This was seen as a key strength of Natural England's scheme. It helped maximise participation because there are two walk leaders who can cope with different paces.

He [the volunteer walk leader] was very good, very organised and he explained what would happen on the walk.

Male, Age Not Disclosed, South East

They're fine, they're very good...always somebody will stay at the end just to make sure that everybody keeps up...and they don't expect you to rush if you don't want to.

Female, 65-74, East of England

Just one respondent had a negative experience of the scheme overall. This respondent is a young mother who was hoping to use WfH to lose baby weight and who also wanted to meet some other mothers. The respondent found it difficult to mix with other walkers, a problem that was exacerbated by the narrow paths that the route followed which meant that it was not possible to walk alongside another mother with a pram.

Outcomes of the walks

Respondents generally described a high level of interaction with and appreciation of the natural environment prior to their first WfH walk and several respondents said that the scheme had no impact on this.

However, although the scheme does not appear to create an appreciation of the natural environment where it did not previously exist, many respondents say that their appreciation has been enhanced as a result of the walks.

Oh yeah, you're out in the open air, you're aware of the open countryside, you're aware of it if people damage the countryside.

Female, Age Not Disclosed, South East

A number of respondents also said that WfH opened their eyes to what is in their local area and enabled them to see places that they would not have been aware of had they not participated in the scheme. In particular, respondents living in urban areas said that, prior to going on the walks, they had not realised that there were so many green and open spaces close to them.

I didn't know there was anywhere to walk around Newcastle [under Lyme] itself...it's quite surprising what is on your doorstep.

Female, 18-54, West Midlands

2.4 Reasons for Stopping Walking with WfH and Barriers to Participation

The telephone survey showed the two most common reasons for no longer participating in WfH are deterioration of health (30%) and being too busy (30%). These are followed by inconvenient timing of the walks (8%) and participation in other physical activities (8%).

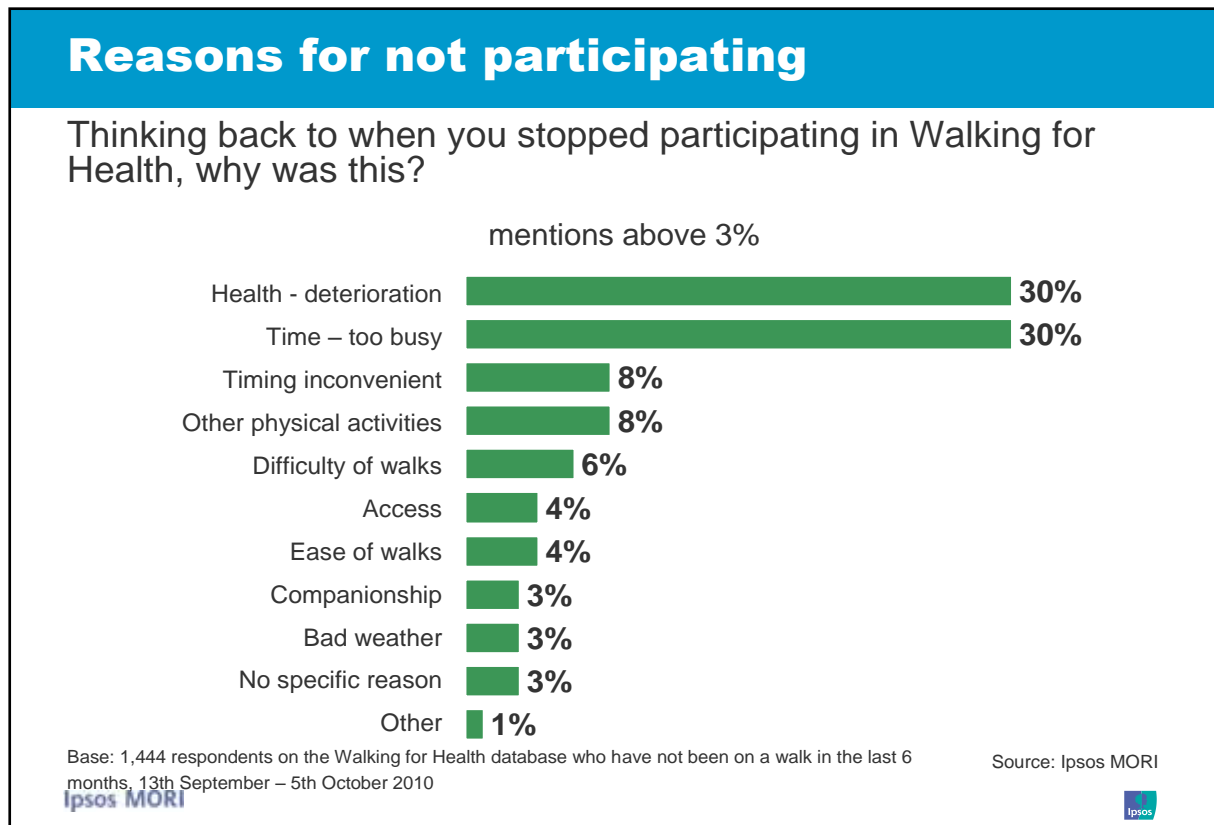


Figure 1 Reasons for not participating in WfH

There are significant differences between the types of people that stopped walking for the reasons mentioned above. Those aged 75+ were more likely to have stopped walking with WfH because of deterioration in their **health** than younger respondents (54% vs. 13% of those aged 16-54). Other groups who were more likely than average to refer to deterioration in health included:

- those who were doing 0-2 days of physical activity per week (according to their response to the OHQ – 36% vs. 23% of those doing three or more days);
- those who have at least one of the following health issues: heart condition, balance issues, bone/joint issues, or chest pain (55% vs. 24% of those who do not have any)¹;
- those who have high blood pressure (48%) or answered 'yes' to any of the other health diagnostic questions on the OHQ (heart disease, COPD, Diabetes, Asthma) (47% vs. 21% of those who answered 'no' to all).

¹ The information is taken from the responses to the health screening questions on the OHQ

Younger respondents (aged 16-54) were more likely to have stopped WfH because they were **too busy** (38% vs. 16% of those aged 75+). One in seven (13%) of this age group also found the WfH walks occurred at inconvenient times, whereas only 4% of those aged 65-74 found this to be the case.

As observed with some of the in-depth interviews, some respondents were apparently struggling to balance walking for health with other activities they participate in. Those doing three or more days of activity per week were more likely to have stopped WfH because of other physical activities than those doing 0-2 days (10% vs. 6%).

The majority of respondents who participated in the in-depth interviews said that they stopped participating in WfH walks because of timing issues; either they did not have sufficient time or the timings of the walks conflicted with other commitments.

I had to swap days of having my grandchildren, and then I couldn't do it.

Female, 55-64, East

Both of us got rather busy this summer, and we sort of haven't carried on doing it.

Female, 65-74, East

A smaller number of respondents say that they were no longer able to participate because their health declined and they were no longer able to complete the walks.

The two reasons listed above were the most common causes for non-participation. However, as in the telephone survey, respondents stopped for other reasons. One female respondent said that she stopped because the onset of winter meant that she felt that it was too dark to keep walking. Bad weather in general was mentioned by 3% of respondents in the telephone survey, but only three people specifically mentioned it was too dark to continue with WfH so this is not a common problem.

Another female respondent said that she stopped because the particular scheme that she was walking with finished and there was not another one in her area for her to join. The telephone survey showed 2% of respondents stopped participating because they believed the scheme had stopped.

The biggest barrier to participation in the WfH scheme is the health of the participants. As has been discussed above, a number of respondents said that they stopped going on the walks because their health did not permit them to continue.

However, in addition to the health of the respondents, there are other barriers preventing participation in the scheme. Despite the fact a large number of respondents said that they first heard about the scheme either in leaflets or in the local press (see section 2.2.1), a number of respondents said that a lack of advertising is a problem, and that this limits participation in WfH. One respondent said that such a lack of advertising prevented her from being able to continue to participate in the scheme.

A further barrier to participation is the necessarily inhibitive effect that the scheme has on spontaneity. A small number of respondents commented on the need to obtain the times of

the walks and plan which they want to go on in advance, and contrast this with the possibility of going on spontaneous, independent walks.

It's not spontaneous. I might phone one of my friends up and say 'Do you fancy a walk?'...You do do that, whereas I think with this you have to plan it, you have to look in the book, decide on a day...'

Female, 65-74, East of England

Indeed, as explained in more detail in section 2.6, informal walking with friends or family was the most common type of physical activity mentioned by 43% of those who participate in other activities.

There was also some conflict between respondents' desire to walk in a rural environment and the need for the walks to be accessible, a conflict which the respondents recognised as being a problem for the scheme organisers.

I thought the walks were too much on the pavements...I would have liked them to be a bit more rural...but I suppose then you would have to travel for longer and it might be too far away.

Female, 55-64, Yorkshire

This conflict is made more acute by lack of bus routes in some rural areas making it more difficult to access any walks that do not start within towns and by the reluctance of some walkers to spend money on petrol to reach the starting points of the walks; one respondent mentions the necessity of driving to the location of the walk in her area as a problem with the scheme.

You have to obviously get in your car and go to the start of the walk, and that involves time and it involves petrol money...and you do sometimes think 'Well I won't go too far afield, because that's a very long way to go'....And the buses in Norfolk aren't very good.

Female, 65-74, East of England

2.5 Encouraging Participation

2.5.1 Encouraging participation among inactive walkers

A large number of respondents said that they stopped participating in WfH for personal reasons, such as a deterioration in their health, rather than because they did not enjoy the walks. For this reason, encouraging participation amongst inactive walkers might be a challenge for the programme.

There isn't anything they could do to get me to go again. I very much enjoyed it but I stopped because of my wife.

Male, 55-64, East Midlands

However, amongst those respondents who are still able to complete the walks, the idea of a reminder card, sent through the post to inactive walkers, was generally well-received. A large number of respondents felt that this would give them a useful nudge towards participating in the scheme. One female respondent in particular said that this would help to compensate for what she feels is a lack of publicity about the scheme and make sure that walkers are aware of the times and dates of the walks.

Yes, reminders...they're not that well advertised so unless they sort of keep in touch with you or you know where to look for the adverts then you don't always get to hear about them in time.

Female, 55-64, Yorkshire

Although the majority of respondents said that they are in favour of a reminder card, a few said that they would prefer not to be contacted directly about the scheme, and the fact that participation is relatively informal is an attraction of WfH. *I think the fact that you could just turn up at these walks, you didn't have to let them know...I think that's what I did like... I don't think you want them following you... I know the walks are there...I think people who are interested will do it.*

Female, 55-64, North East

In addition to these reservations, one respondent questioned how effective reminder cards would be. This respondent said that she already receives a regular calendar telling her when the future walks are, and that this has not caused her to go on any further walks with the scheme as the times have not suited her.

It has already been seen that a couple of respondents felt there was not a sufficient degree of variety in the walks available in their area (mentioned by 2% of those in the telephone survey as a reason for stopping WfH). In relation to this, these respondents also said that a wider choice of walks might encourage them to participate in WfH walks in the future.

2.5.2 Encouraging wider participation in WfH

The majority of respondents agreed that it would be good if Natural England were able to encourage wider participation in WfH. In particular, several respondents said they felt it would be positive if the scheme were able to attract younger walkers, although it is also acknowledged that this might be difficult, both because younger people might feel that the scheme is targeted at older people and because younger people are more likely to have jobs that prevent them from joining the walking groups, which are currently scheduled to happen during the day on weekdays.

It would be nice to have different ages I suppose, but you're not going to get younger people doing it, unless they get a day off or something.

Female, 55-64, East of England

This point is supported by responses to the telephone survey, as those aged 16-54 are more likely to have stopped WfH due to the inconvenient times of the walks (13% vs. 8% overall).

While encouraging a younger audience to participate is seen as a problem, a number of respondents said that more press and publicity would encourage greater participation in WfH, because, as has been discussed (see 2.5.1), it is felt that there is a lack of awareness of the scheme and that this constitutes a barrier to participation.

More press could help. There are leaflets in libraries and at the doctors' but otherwise there's not much publicity.

Female, 55-64, Yorkshire

A couple of respondents also suggested that the scheme could develop closer ties with GPs' practices. These respondents felt that, given the health benefits of the scheme, GPs could be well-placed to inform their patients about it and encourage them to participate.

Put posters up in doctors' surgeries, or maybe have something connected to doctors' surgeries, where doctors maybe tell people that they have to go along.

Female, 18-54, West Midlands

Several respondents also said that overcoming potential transport problems would encourage both inactive and new walkers to participate. This is particularly pertinent in the light of the conflict between respondents' desire for more rural walks and the need for the walks to be easily accessible for all participants. Suggestions include circulating the names and addresses of people going on walks so that walkers could go together and providing bus services into the countryside for more rural walks.

A final suggestion was that the WfH walks could be tied in with other activities to attract participants for whom a simple walk was not sufficient, or those with young children. One respondent suggested that the walks could be centred around local sights of interest, whilst another felt that finding a way to involve children in the walks, for example by incorporating children-friendly events into the scheme, would be a positive way of encouraging wider participation.

They should encourage children to go, because if you don't start them young then they don't get into the habit.

Female, 55-64, Yorkshire

It is important for WfH to attempt to target younger people as this is the age at which habits of physical activity and interaction with the natural environment are formed. These comments and observations from the in-depth interviews reinforces the importance of Natural England's 'One Million Children Outdoors' programme, which aims to encourage more children to visit places such as nature reserves and environmentally friendly farms.

Despite these suggestions, and a wider feeling amongst respondents that WfH has made a positive contribution to their well-being and that participation ought to be encouraged, a number of respondents were sceptical about the possibility of new walkers being enticed to join. Some respondents said that they simply do not have any ideas about what could be done or that they do not think that Natural England could do more than it is currently doing. Among a small number of respondents there was also a feeling that if people are interested

in walking they will do so, and that if they are not interested then there is little that can be done to encourage them.

I think walkers tend to be walkers. You know there are these walking groups and people either want to do it and they're quite keen [or they're not]. I don't know what you can do to encourage others, really.

Female, 55-64, North East

I can't honestly see that they can do a lot more than they're doing.

Female, 65-74 East of England

2.6 Other Physical Activities

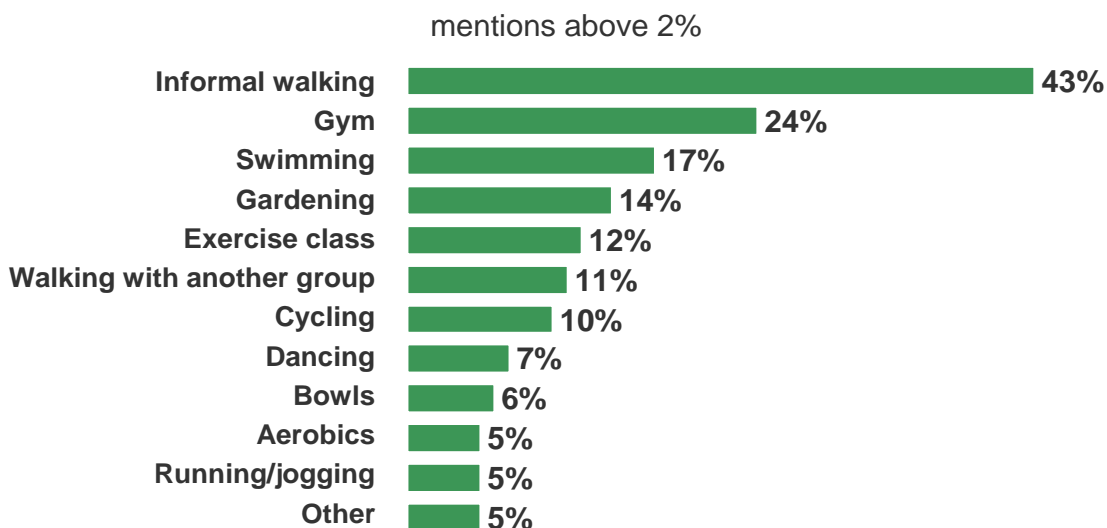
As has already been discussed (see section 2.1) respondents from the in-depth interviews generally have quite an active lifestyle and were taking part in a variety of physical activities prior to their involvement in WfH. The telephone survey shows a quarter (24%) of those interviewed were taking part in other physical activities² that prevented them from taking part in WfH.

As mentioned in section 2.4, informal walking with friends or family (43%) was the most common physical activity (outside of WfH) that respondents took part in. This is followed by gym (24%), swimming (17%) and gardening (14%). These activities were also mentioned during the in-depth interviews. Those aged 75+ were most likely to engage in informal walking compared to those of other age groups (56% vs. 37% of those aged 65-74), and were less likely to participate in other physical activities such as gym or swimming; only 12% of those aged 75+ mentioned gym and none mentioned swimming compared to 39% and 24% of those aged 16-54 who mentioned those activities respectively.

² This proportion is calculated by combining those who spontaneously mentioned this at Q3 (8%) and a further 16% who said they were participating in other activities when prompted

Other physical activities

What form of physical activity were you / have you been participating in?



Base: 327 respondents on the Walking for Health database who have not been on a walk in the last 6 months, and participate in other physical activities, 13th September – 5th October 2010

Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI



Figure 2 Other physical activities of former WfH participants

From the in-depth interviews it was noted that in general, the physical activities that respondents are currently participating in are the same ones they were doing prior to joining the scheme. There was little suggestion that they stopped participating in WfH because they moved on to other activities, or that they became more physically active as a result of their participation. Rather, as has been seen above (see section 2.4), respondents normally stopped participating because of health reasons and timing conflicts.

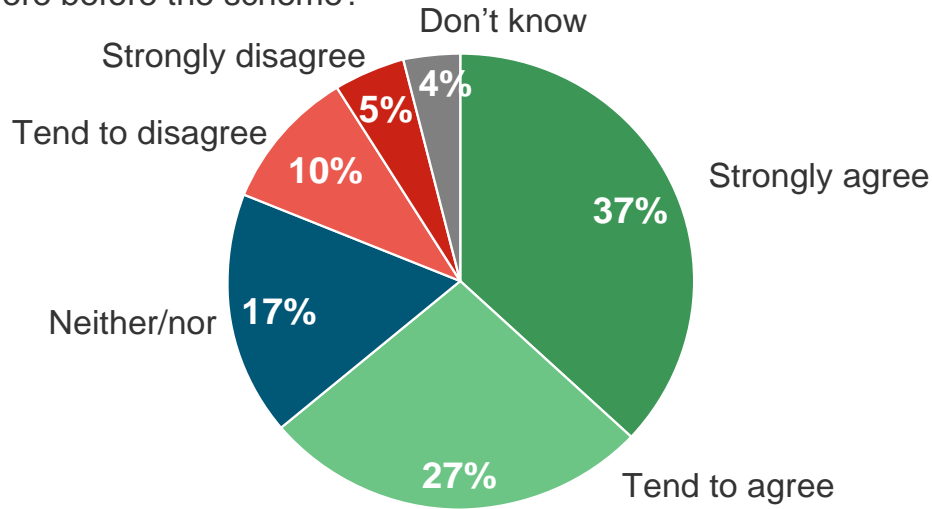
Before I swam a couple of times a week and I went to the gym and I still do that.

Male, Age Not Disclosed, South East

These findings contrast with those of the telephone survey, in which nearly two thirds (64%) of respondents said that participating in WfH had encouraged them to be more physically active and nearly two fifths (37%) agreed with this strongly. In this instance the larger sample size and direct question used suggest we base our findings on the telephone survey, and we should be encouraged that WfH is having a positive impact on levels of physical activity.

Encouragement to be more active

To what extent would you agree or disagree that taking part in Walking for Health has encouraged you to become more physically active than you were before the scheme?



Base: 327 respondents on the Walking for Health database who have not been on a walk in the last 6 months, and participate in other physical activities, 13th September – 5th October 2010

Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI



Figure 3 Did WfH encourage you to be more active

Regarding responses to the telephone survey, those with high blood pressure and those with other health problems are more likely to agree that participation in WfH has encouraged them to be more physically active. Four in five (80%) of those with high blood pressure and three quarters (74%) of those with other health conditions vs. three in five (59%) of those without a health condition said this. This is a positive result as these people are targeted by WfH with encouragement to participate in gentle exercise.

3. Conclusions

3.1 Conclusions

Walking for Health is seen as a positive scheme by those spoken to in the in-depth interviews, and the telephone survey results indicate there are no major issues related to enjoyment of the walks themselves. Of particular note are the volunteer walk leaders, who are seen as being very helpful, and the ease of accessing and attending the walks.

When asked in the in-depth interviews about spending time in the natural environment, participants felt it was very important and have had a high degree of interaction with it throughout their lives. Again, this points to the need to encourage children and young people to interact with the natural environment from a young age as it continues into adult life. This reinforces the importance of Natural England's 'One Million Children Outdoors' programme.

Walking for Health does meet the needs of a key group in society, specifically for those who are already active but have specific health problems preventing them from continuing with their previous levels of activity, WfH provides a 'step up' or a 'step down'. It is a 'step up' for those recovering from health problems or a 'step down' for those used to be active and with declining health. Due to this, it may be that WfH does not in fact lead to a sustained increase in physical activity of its participants, as for those who are 'stepping down' this is not the intended outcome of their participation in WfH.

It is also clear from the telephone survey results that those who stopped participating in WfH due to participation in other physical activities did so because they are already walkers. Informal walking with friends or family is the most common type of physical activity mentioned, so WfH is not 'competing' with any other activity types in their target groups.

From the in-depth interviews, it is clear that Walking for Health is seen as a positive initiative by those who have taken part. No major changes to the format of the walks are needed but in some instances it might be worth reviewing the time of walks on offer in areas where the scheme wants to target younger people. For example, it may be appropriate to conduct trial walks at the weekend or evenings in areas in which this does not already happen.

In order to widen participation in WfH, it is worth noting that the most common source of information is word-of-mouth; respondents were told about the walks by friends or acquaintances who had themselves participated. Volunteer walk leaders could potentially encourage participants to invite their friends or family along as a way of expanding involvement. To increase local exposure, further current methods that seem to be working well include placing leaflets in doctors' surgeries, libraries or health centres, and the local press. These could be expanded, potentially to include other local groups such as churches and youth clubs for younger people or local businesses, for example, further distribution of the 12-week walking plan from Millets. It is important to use dedicated volunteers in these exercises as they are strong advocates of the scheme and will promote it well.

The promotion of WfH by doctors could also be assessed, to find out who doctors are targeting with the material and also how often they encourage people to attend.

The idea of issuing reminder cards to those who have not attended a WfH walk for a certain period of time was suggested to respondents during the in-depth interviews. There was a mixed reaction to this as some felt it would encourage them to attend purely as a reminder as they had forgotten about the scheme. However, others felt that they could easily find information about the walks if they wanted to (e.g. regular calendars produced locally), and some felt they would not want to be 'chased'. It is also worth considering the cost of reminder cards, and in an age of austerity, we recommend this is not an initiative Natural England should necessarily follow up. It may be more suitable to encourage the volunteer walk leaders to approach those who have not attended for a while and make contact using the method they feel to be most appropriate. For example, a quick telephone call may be possible for some participants, or it could be that posting the seasonal calendar may be more appropriate for others.

As already mentioned, walk leaders are seen as a key strength of the WfH scheme, and the contribution these volunteers make should continue. In particular, Natural England should encourage recruitment to be able to have at least two on each walk to help deal with the problem of different paces of walkers.

The issue of cliques was one raised by a few respondents in the in-depth interviews and it is worth considering how this might be addressed. This might be done by advertising a walk specifically for new members, or by pairing up new people who attend to ensure everyone is made to feel welcome.

Generating a 'community' around WfH also helps with publicising the scheme. Recent awards, such as those for local volunteers at the Durham County Sports Awards 2010, and the Change4Life award won by the Wolverhampton WfH scheme have rewarded those who volunteer and take part, as well as increasing awareness of the scheme. The 'Walking for Health and me' story competition is also an initiative which will make participants feel more involved and therefore more likely to speak to their friends and family about the scheme.

Appendix A

Research on the reasons for inactivity in the Walking for Health Initiative

Final Discussion Guide – Inactive walkers

Interview time: around 30 minutes overall

Overall project objectives

- To regularly monitor the physical activity levels of a sample of WfH participants through re-test of the single item metric on the Outdoor Health Questionnaire;
- To record data collected about WfH participants' physical activity levels onto the WfH database;
- **To find out the reasons why WfH members become 'inactive', in particular, identifying barriers to participation; and**
- **To establish what alternative sports or activities 'inactive' people might be undertaking and, if they are active in other ways, to record it onto the WfH database.**

MODERATOR NOTES

- Throughout discussions, **please probe reasons for perceptions, reactions and emotions to questions asked.**
- We want to understand the **motivators** as well as the **barriers** to use.

Discussion Areas	Notes
1. Introduction and Background	5 mins
<p>Introduction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thank participant for taking part in the research ▪ Introduce self, Ipsos MORI ▪ Explain purpose of research and that interview will last for about 30 minutes and will be audio recorded (gain permission to record) for analysis purposes. No one will be able to identify them from the research findings ▪ Reassure re: confidentiality, MRS code of conduct. We are independent researchers and want to hear about your experiences and views. ▪ Explain importance of being able to say what they think, no right or wrong answers, need for honesty, validity of all opinions <p>Background</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How long have you lived in the area? ▪ Do you have a job/did you have a job? What is/was it? ▪ How many people are in your household? ▪ What do you enjoy doing in your spare time? ▪ Over the course of your life, how much interaction would you say you had with the natural environment? Do you enjoy spending time in the countryside? PROMPT: This may include parks and other open spaces. 	<p>Orientates respondent gets them prepared to take part in the discussion</p> <p>Outlines the 'rules' of the discussion (including those we are required to tell them about under MRS and Data Protection Act guidelines)</p> <p>Gives respondent a chance to start interacting and provides contextual background information respondent</p>
2. Walking for Health	10 mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We are doing this research to explore people's perceptions of Natural England's Walking for Health Scheme. Can I check, firstly, that you remember taking part in a Walking for Health walk? PROMPT: You may have been on a local walk organised by a walk leader and as part of this will have completed an Outdoor Health Questionnaire. ▪ Where did you hear about the Walking for Health scheme? 	<p>Respondents are given a chance to think about their WfH experience</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Why did you decide to go on a walk? PROBE: health reasons, friends/family going, meeting new people, interested in the environment/nature. ▪ What were your initial thoughts about the scheme before going on your first walk? PROBE: Were you looking forward to it or was there anything that worried you? Did anyone explain the walk scheme? ▪ To what extent did you know what to expect from the walk? PROBE: length, duration, speed, equipment needed ▪ What sort of people did you expect to be taking part in the walk? ▪ Was it easy or difficult to find the location of the walk? ▪ How did you find the walk when you were on it? Was the walk itself easy or difficult? ▪ How was the volunteer walk leader? PROMPT: Were they helpful and encouraging? ▪ How did you find walking with other people? ▪ Did you plan to go on further walks using the scheme? 	<p>Beginning to explore potential reasons for and against participating</p>
<p>3. Reasons for inactivity</p>	<p>5 mins</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are there any specific reasons why you have not participated in further Walking for Health walks? ▪ Health PROBE: Do your health reasons prevent you from participating in Walking for Health or all physical activities? ▪ Time pressures PROBE: ▪ Did not enjoy it PROBE: What aspects of the walk did you not enjoy? ▪ Other friends/family stopped participating PROBE: Are there any activities that they do instead? ▪ Change in circumstance e.g. moved away, no walks nearby ▪ Organisation of walks - same walks Time of day, day of week inconvenient. ▪ Lack of information ▪ Places where walks happened, PROBE: what did you think of the places where you walked? Particular likes/dislikes. Was there a good variety of different locations/walks? were you aware of them/had you been there before? ▪ What would encourage you to participate in Walking for Health specifically? Why? PROMPT: What about reminder contact from a 	<p>Specifically asking about reasons for inactivity</p>

<p>volunteer walk leader? Do you think that would work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you think that there is anything that Walking for Health could do to attract a wider range of participants? IF YES: What? 	
<p>4. Other activities</p>	<p>5 mins</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did you participate in any other physical activities before going on your Walking for Health walk? NB. This could include informal walking. IF YES: Did any of these activities take place in the natural environment? Have you continued these? ▪ IF NO: Have you taken up any other physical activities since participating in Walking for Health? NB. This could include informal walking. IF YES: Do any of these activities take place in the natural environment? ▪ Why are you involved with these activities? What is it that you enjoy about these activities? ▪ How many times do you do these during the week? ▪ Has doing these activities prevented you from participating in Walking for Health? ▪ Do other people in your household participate in physical activities? IF YES: What and for how long? ▪ What would encourage you to participate in other physical activities? Why? ▪ Were you a member of or involved with environmental charities or organisations before going on your Walking for Health walk? IF YES: What does your membership/involvement entail? Have you continued these? ▪ IF NO: Have you become a member of or involved with any environmental charities or organisations since participating in Walking for Health? IF YES: What does your membership/involvement entail? ▪ Why are you involved with these activities? What is it that you enjoy about these activities? ▪ How much time does this take up in a week? ▪ Are other people in your household involved with environmental charities or organisations? IF YES: What and for how long? ▪ What would encourage you to be involved with environmental charities or organisations? Why? ▪ Has your participation in Walking for Health had an impact on your appreciation or awareness of the natural environment? IF YES: In what way? ▪ Have you done any volunteering work within the natural 	<p>These questions are to explore other areas which may be related to walking, health and the natural environment. They will be used to find out what the motivators or barriers of these are and see if these can be applied to WfH.</p>

<p>environment? If Yes: what is it? How did you hear about it, get involved?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How important would you say it is to spend time in the natural environment? Why? 	
5. Concluding remarks	5 Mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Any final comments? ▪ As part of this research, we would like to give you £20 as a thank you for your time. Please can you confirm the name the cheque can be made payable to and the address. <p>THANK AND CLOSE</p>	

Appendix B

Natural England Walking for Health Evaluation 10-009828-01

Wave 2 Questionnaire, Version 3

13th September 2010

Good morning/afternoon/evening. May I speak to xxxxx?

My name is from Ipsos MORI, the independent research organisation. We are phoning on behalf of Natural England.

A few months ago, you very kindly took part in a telephone interview about physical activity. The purpose of the interview was to help understand the impact of Natural England's Walking for Health scheme. During the interview you agreed we could contact you again about the scheme.

ACTIVE WALKERS: We would like to ask you the same question on physical activity. Once again your response will be added to Natural England's database for this project.

INACTIVE WALKERS: We would like to ask you a few questions about the scheme. Once again some of your responses will be added to Natural England's database for this project.

IF FURTHER EXPLANATION IS NEEDED: Natural England uses a database containing your responses to the Outdoor Health Questionnaire you completed when you joined the Walking for Health scheme. Your answers here will supplement this information. The database is used to evaluate and promote the value of Walking for Health.

If you would like more information regarding how the information of the Natural England database is used, please contact Tim Fitches by email (Tim.Fitches@naturalengland.org.uk) or by telephone (0300 0604419).

ASK ALL

1. In the **past week**, on how many days have you done a total of **30 minutes or more** of physical activity, which was enough to raise your breathing rate?

This may include sport, exercise, and brisk walking or cycling for recreation or to get to and from places, but should not include housework or physical activity that is part of your job.

	01
	02
	03
	04
	05
	06
	07

INACTIVE WALKERS: Please note your responses to the following questions will be treated as confidential and will not be attributed to you.

ALL INACTIVE WALKERS (FROM SAMPLE)

2. Which of the following best describes your participation in Natural England’s Walking for Health scheme?

READ OUT. SINGLE CODE ONLY.

I have not taken part in a walk for at least six months and do NOT intend to in the foreseeable future	01	GO TO Q3
I have not taken part in a walk for at least six months but intend to start again shortly	02	GO TO Q3
I have taken part in a walk in the last six months	03	GO TO Q7

ASK THOSE NO LONGER TAKING PART IN WFH (CODES 1 OR 2 AT Q2)

3. Thinking back to when you stopped participating in Walking for Health, why was this? Please be as honest as possible.

SPONTANEOUS. DO NOT PROMPT. MULTICODE OK.

Access - walks too far away / could only be accessed by car	01
Companionship – friend / relative no longer goes	02
Difficulty of walks – walks too difficult / pace too fast	03
Ease of walks – walks too easy / too slow	04
Group dynamics – did not like / get on with group	05
Health reasons – deterioration of health/injury	06
Health Reasons – improvement in health/recovery from injury	07
Information – lack of information on when / where walks take place	08
Interest – wanted greater variety of walks	09
Leadership – did not like / get on with walk leaders	10
Moved – moved house/area	11
Other activity – too busy with other physical activities	12
Scheme stopped	13
Time – too busy / lack of time /time pressures	14
Time – timing of walks not convenient	15
Weather – stopped attending due to bad weather	16
Weather – stopped attending as too dark	17
No specific reason / didn't intend to stop	18
Can't remember	19
Other (please specify)	20

ASK ALL INACTIVE RESPONDENTS (FROM SAMPLE) EXCLUDING CODE 12 @ Q3

4. Were you participating in other forms of physical activity that prevented you from taking part in Walking for Health?

SINGLE CODE ONLY.

Yes	01
No	02
Don't know	03

ASK THOSE TAKING PART IN OTHER PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (CODE 12 @ Q3 or CODE 1 @ Q4)

5. What form of physical activity were you / have you been participating in?

DO NOT PROMPT. MULTICODE OK.

Aerobics	01
Angling	02
Badminton	03
Bowls	04
Cricket	05
Cycling	06
Equestrian	07
Exercise class – e.g. yoga, pilates, spin	08
Gardening	09
Golf	10
Gym	11
Outdoor conservation / clean up local environment / green gym	12
Squash	13
Swimming	14
Walking – with another	15

walking group	
Walking – informally / on my own / with family and friends	16
Other (please specify)	17

ASK ALL INACTIVE RESPONDENTS WHO CODE 12 @ Q3 CODED 1 AT Q4

6. To what extent would you agree or disagree that taking part in Walking for Health has encouraged you to become more physically active than you were before the scheme?

READ OUT. REVERSE ORDER. ALLOW DK. SINGLE CODE ONLY.

Strongly agree	01
Tend to agree	02
Neither agree nor disagree	03
Tend to disagree	04
Strongly disagree	05

RECONTACT QUESTION

7. Thank you for taking part in today's interview. Over the next six months we would like to contact you two more times to help our evaluation of Natural England's Walking for Health scheme. Would you agree to be re-contacted then?

Yes	01	THANK AND CLOSE
No	02	THANK AND CLOSE

- THANK AND CLOSE -