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Study: 44 percent aren't active enough

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In a recent study of Spartanburg residents, 84 percent reported that their neighborhoods were good places to engage in physical activity, but only 16 percent said people in their neighborhoods were very active.

According to the study, the average Spartanburg resident spends seven hours sitting each weekday, and 44 percent of residents are considered insufficiently active, meaning they get less than 30 minutes of moderate activity each day.

The Mary Black Foundation and Hub-Bub.com sponsored a science cafe Friday morning to discuss the three-year study. The Priority Metrics Group conducted the analysis of more than 2,300 Spartanburg County residents age 18 and older through phone interviews.

Traffic, inadequate lighting and lack of sidewalks were stated as obstacles to exercise.

Personal motivation, however, wasn't cited as a significant reason for people being inactive.

"People don't want to confess that," said Jeff Caton, director of Spartanburg County Parks and Recreation Commission. "I don't know anyone who hasn't bought a piece of exercise equipment and it just sits there."

Officials, though, acknowledged the need for more recreation facilities and more encouragement for people to use them.

John Barrett, president of Priority Metrics Group, said studies have found people are more likely to

exercise in their neighborhoods when sidewalks are present. Eighty-three percent of those surveyed said their neighborhoods didn't have sidewalks. Of the 17 percent with sidewalks, almost half said the sidewalks were very well maintained.

"I was very encouraged that people who lived where parks and sidewalks were felt positive about how they were maintained," City Manager Mark Scott said.

But Scott said more work needs to be done to increase the number of recreation facilities and encourage their use. Twenty-two percent of people said their neighborhoods have recreation facilities that are close to their homes and in good condition.

Caton said people too often think of athletics and team sports as the only way to get physical activity. The county, he added, is in the process of doing more outreach and leading walks and bike rides that also give people exercise and a social outlet. The county also plans to do more to promote exercise among senior citizens, Caton said.

Sixty percent of people surveyed said their neighborhood rarely gets its share of money for recreation facilities.

"Money is not being spent in the same way it's spent in other places to build this type of infrastructure," said Emily Neely, program manager of Upstate Forever's Spartanburg office.

Neely said the Spartanburg Area Transportation Study found that two cents is spent on each person in the county toward active living.

The state average is 22 cents per person, and the national average is more than \$1 per person.

Caton said he thinks the community's physical inactivity stems from people's main focus being work. He said people are still adjusting to the transition of not having to work six or seven days a week.

"We don't really know how to recreate and spend our leisure time," Caton said.

Some of the positives discussed were the possibility of using hospitality taxes for parks and the master plan for downtown, which encourages more walking. Between 2005 and 2006, the miles of trails in the county increased from 57.52 to 67.92. The miles of bike lanes increased from 6.25 to 14.25.

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