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**Self-perceived mental health and health-related behaviours of Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic**

by Heather Gilmour

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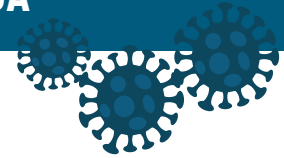
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# Self-perceived mental health and health-related behaviours of Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic

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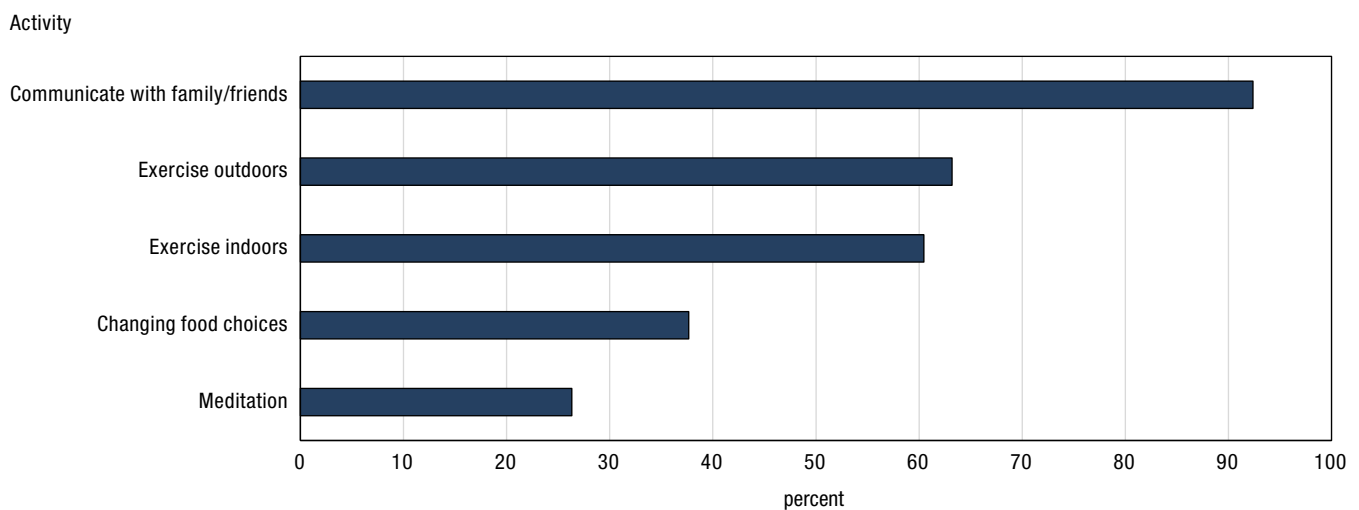
The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting social disruption has left many to struggle with changes to routines and feelings of uncertainty as the impact of the virus continues to unfold. Widespread disease outbreaks, including the current pandemic, have been associated with psychological reactions such as symptoms of anxiety, depression and stress (Rajkumar 2020).

Looking after one’s mental and physical well-being is an important practice during this challenging time. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle and contacts with others are among recommended ways to cope (WHO 2020).

## 9 in 10 Canadians communicated with family and friends

The vast majority of Canadians (92.4%), were making sure to communicate with family and friends for their health (physical and/or mental). About 6 in 10 reported doing physical exercise either outdoors or indoors for their physical and/or mental health. Fewer Canadians were making changes to their food choices (37.7%) or practicing meditation (26.3%) for health reasons.

**Chart 1**  
Most Canadians participated in activities to help manage their physical and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic



**Note:** This chart shows behaviours reported during the week of March 29 to April 3, 2020.  
**Source:** Canadian Perspective Survey Series 1: Impacts of COVID-19 (5311).



## Those with better mental health were more likely to have exercised outdoors

According to the recent Canadian Perspectives Survey Series (CPSS), wave 1, 22.6% of Canadians aged 15 or older reported excellent mental health during the survey period. Additionally, 31.3% reported very good mental health, 28.3% good mental health, and 17.7% fair or poor mental health.

**Table 1**  
**Percentage of men and women who participated in selected activities for their health during COVID-19, by self-perceived mental health, Canada, excluding the territories, 2020**

Activity	Self-perceived mental health			
	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair/poor
	percent			
<b>Men</b>				
Communicate with family/friends	87.6*	91.8	89.7	94.3
Exercise outdoors	65.1*	66.2*	60.6	50.5
Exercise indoors	56.6	55.6*	62.0*	44.1
Changing food choices	29.7*	36.6	42.9	44.7
Meditation	20.6*	21.0*	27.4	32.4 <sup>E</sup>
<b>Women</b>				
Communicate with family/friends	91.5	97.8*	96.0*	90.1
Exercise outdoors	69.8*	70.7*	64.5*	50.8
Exercise indoors	65.6	68.5*	64.2	58.2
Changing food choices	39.5	33.4	40.7	35.3
Meditation	30.8	30.0	27.2	26.7

<sup>E</sup> use with caution

\* Significantly different from the estimate for those in fair or poor mental health ( $p < 0.05$ )

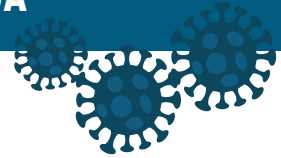
**Note:** This table shows behaviours reported during the week of March 29 to April 3, 2020.

**Source:** Canadian Perspective Survey Series 1: Impacts of COVID-19 (5311).

Both men and women with better mental health were more likely than their counterparts with fair/poor mental health to have exercised outdoors. Similarly, men with very good or good mental health, and women with good mental health were more likely than those in fair/poor health to have exercised indoors. Evidence suggests that exercise can have a positive influence on aspects of mental health (Mikkelsen 2017).

Additionally, men with fair or poor mental health were more likely than those in excellent mental health to have changed their food choices for health reasons. Men in fair or poor mental health were also more likely than men in excellent or very good mental health to have meditated during the survey period.

As these data provide a snapshot in time, we do not know whether participation in health-related activities represent changes in behaviour or ongoing routines, or whether mental health status has changed since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.



## Methodology

Data in this release are from Statistics Canada's new Canadian Perspectives Survey Series (CPSS), wave 1, for which a panel of Canadians have agreed to complete a number of short online surveys. The CPSS is a probabilistic panel survey and is therefore representative of the general population. More than 4,600 people in the 10 provinces responded to this survey between March 29th and April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020.

Canadians were asked whether they were doing any of the following activities for their health: communication with friends and family; mediation; exercise outdoors; exercise indoors; changing my food choices. Response categories were "yes, for my mental health"; "yes, for my physical health"; "yes, for both my mental and physical health"; or "no".

## References

Rajkumar RP. COVID-19 and mental health: A review of the existing literature. *Asian Journal of Psychiatry* 2020; 52: 102066.

World Health Organization. [Coping with stress during the 2019-nCoV outbreak](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/coping-with-stress.pdf?sfvrsn=9845bc3a_2). Available at: [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/coping-with-stress.pdf?sfvrsn=9845bc3a\\_2](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/coping-with-stress.pdf?sfvrsn=9845bc3a_2) Accessed April 21, 2020

Mikkelsen K, Stojanovska L, Polenakovic M, et al. Exercise and mental health. *Maturitas* 2017; 106: 48-56.

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