



**SOCIAL
ENGINE**

Lifestyle behaviours research report

Appendix A: Headline Findings

February 2024



Contents

- Current health, wellbeing and lifestyle behaviours..... 2
 - Health status..... 2
 - Happiness and wellbeing..... 5
 - Lifestyle behaviours- smoking, vaping, alcohol use, diet and physical activity 7
- Accessing health and lifestyle services and information..... 14
 - Accessing health and lifestyle support and information..... 14
 - Choosing and using lifestyle services 15
- Motivational factors for healthier lifestyle behaviours 17
- The impact of COVID-19 on people’s lives and lifestyle..... 19



About Social Engine

Social Engine was founded in 2015 to support organisations to adopt an evidenced-based and insight-led approach. We work with charities, local authorities, social enterprises and other social purpose organisations to overcome organisational challenges through engagement, research and the application of evidence into practice.

Our work involves conducting research, gathering insights and applying behavioural insights to support service improvement across a wide range of policy and service areas in order to improve outcomes for individuals and communities.

www.social-engine.co.uk

Headline Findings

Current health, wellbeing and lifestyle behaviours

The overall picture of the health and wellbeing of residents in the borough is of generally good health and wellbeing. A majority of people report having a good diet, being reasonably active and being happy and satisfied with their lives. However, we can see that a minority of people – around 10-20% of the population –report poorer diet, lifestyle and general wellbeing.

Health status

The majority of residents in Cheshire East feel that their diet is healthy, with just over one in six people saying they did not and 6% saying they did not know if their diet was healthy or not.

Around half (52%) of respondents told us that they “mostly eat well and stay active”, whilst 31% said that they either had a good diet or were active but not both. However, 7% of respondents self-reported that their “diet and activity need a lot of work”.

Figure 1: Generally speaking, do you think you have a healthy diet?

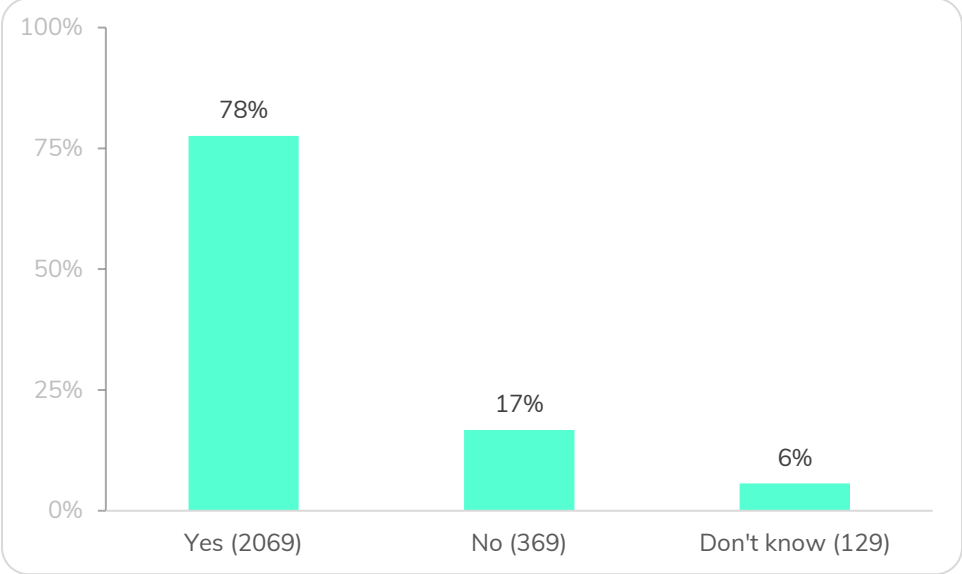
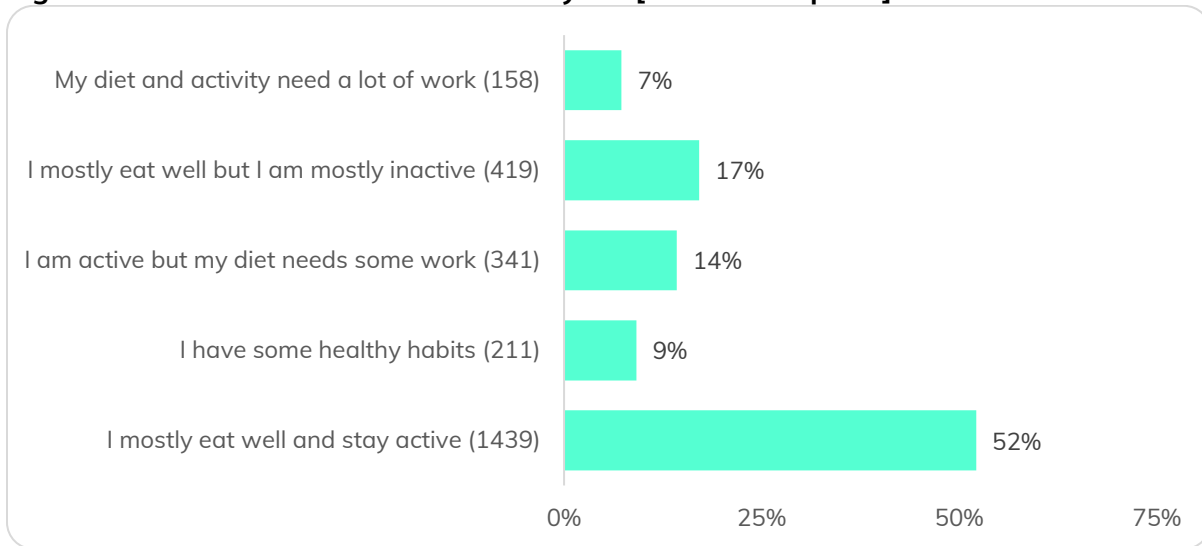
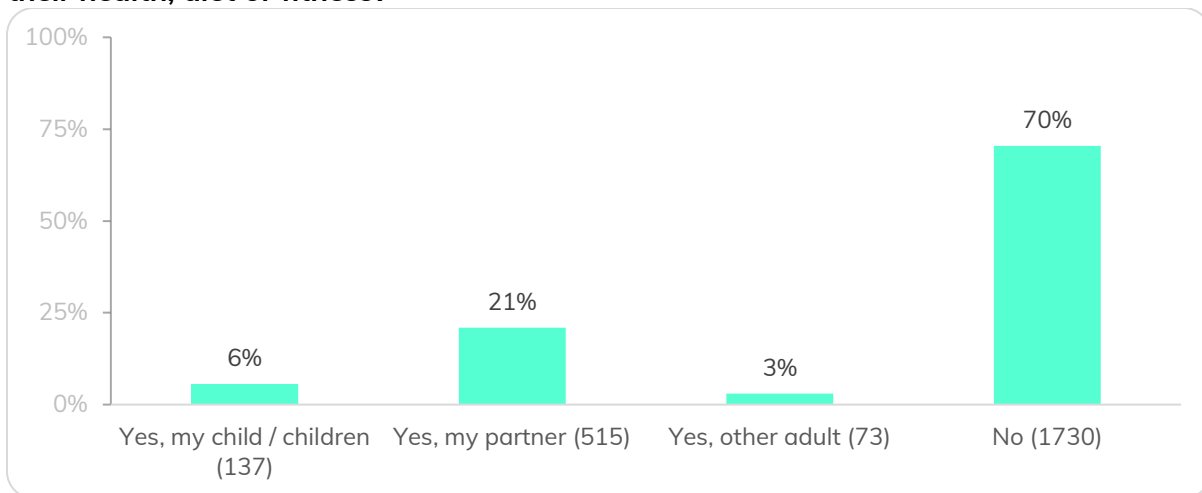


Figure 2: Which of these best describes you? [select one option]



Whilst the majority (70%) of people told us that they did not have concerns about the health, diet or fitness of others whom they lived with, around one quarter (24%) said they were concerned about their partner or another adult that they lived with. 6% also said they had concerns about their children’s health and wellbeing.

Figure 3: Thinking about the other people in your household, do you have concerns about their health, diet or fitness?



Concerns about others

Those living with others frequently worried about diagnosed health conditions, lifestyle choices and mental health issues of household members.

Regarding lifestyle choices, inactivity was named the most frequently as a concern, followed by dietary choices and being overweight. In terms of diet, worries related most often to a

perceived lack in vegetables and fruit. A significant number respondents also mentioned that household members consumed too much alcohol in their eyes, and that their smoking/vaping were causes of worry. Some mentioned that these “poor” lifestyle choices were due to other health conditions, such as gastric issues, mobility issues or long Covid.

With regard to diagnosed health conditions, chronic conditions such as asthma, arthritis or COPD were mentioned most frequently, followed by age-related conditions such as dementia, Alzheimer’s, memory loss and low mobility. Several respondents also told us about more acute health issues ranging from serious illnesses such as cancer and strokes to knee problems or back pain.

Mental health issues were mentioned less often than lifestyle and physical health conditions, but still featured considerably. Those described were mostly connected to depression, anxiety and/or stress.

A small number of respondents referred to disabilities and neurodivergence, for instance children with autism or ADHD.

“Needs more exercise as needs to be at desk a lot.”

“Not enough fresh fruit and vegetables”

“Elderly and unable to exercise fully. Unable to eat well due to health.”

“We've both gained some weight but trying to resolve it”

“One of my children drinks too much for my liking”

“I wish he wouldn't smoke”

“Husband has painful back so walking is difficult, also had dementia, osteoarthritis and heart problems. Sleeps a lot and does not eat much.”

“My wife is experiencing pain and stiffness in her knee”

“My 65-year-old son has advanced, incurable bowel cancer”

“Husband had heart attack, on lots of medication, has to take things at an easy pace”

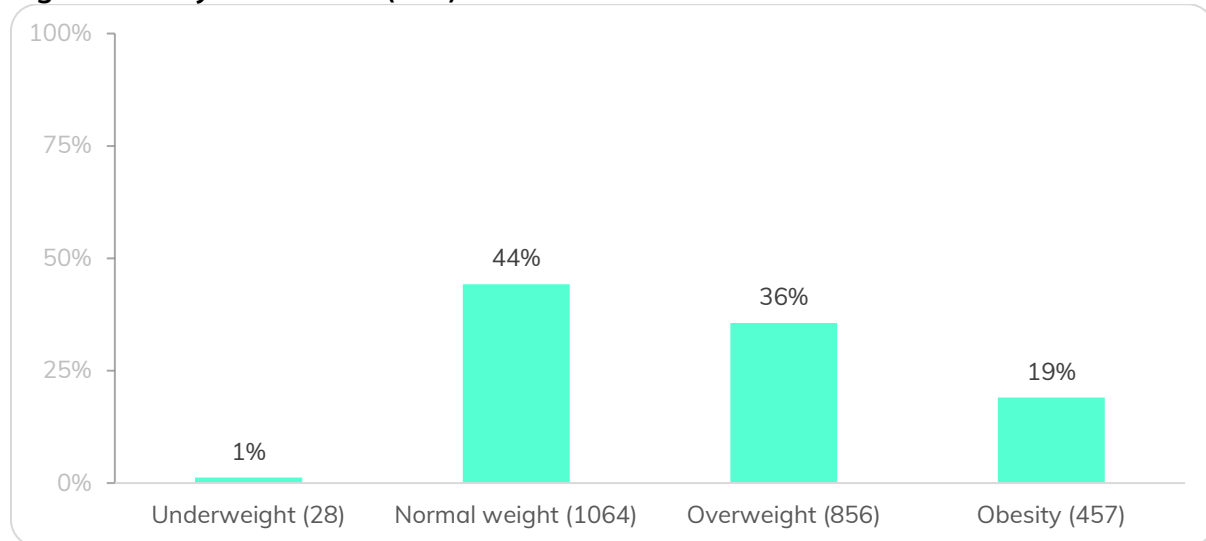
“Sibling has mental health issues and has tried to commit suicide before. Refused to see mental health specialist”

“I have two ASD children witch struggle new things and health options don't work for them”

Body Mass Index (BMI)

Based on their BMI - which were calculated using self-reported responses to questions about people's weight and height – around one in five (19%) of the population of Cheshire East are obese, with a further 36% overweight. Just under half (44%) are within normal weight range according to their Body Mass Index.

Figure 4: Body Mass Index (BMI)



Happiness and wellbeing

Questions on people's happiness and wellbeing used a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely". Responses to this question have been grouped into the following categories for analysis purposes: 0-4, 5-6, 7-8 and 9-10.

When we asked how satisfied people were with their lives, how worthwhile they felt their lives were and how happy they were yesterday, responses were fairly consistent across all three measures. Around two-thirds of respondents told us they were reasonably satisfied (63%), felt their lives were worthwhile (68%) and that they were happy yesterday (67%) with scores of 7 or higher. We also found that a broadly similar proportion of respondents said they were dissatisfied (14%), that their lives were not worthwhile (12%) or that they were unhappy (15%) with scores of 4 or less.

When asked how anxious they felt yesterday, 18% of people indicated at least a degree of anxiety (with a score of 7-10¹), which was consistent with scores of 0-4 on the other happiness and wellbeing questions. Two thirds (65%) indicated that they were not very anxious (score 0-4) which again is in line with the other happiness and wellbeing questions.

¹ Since the question asks how anxious people were yesterday, the scales are reversed; so higher scores reflect greater anxiety.

Figure 5: Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?

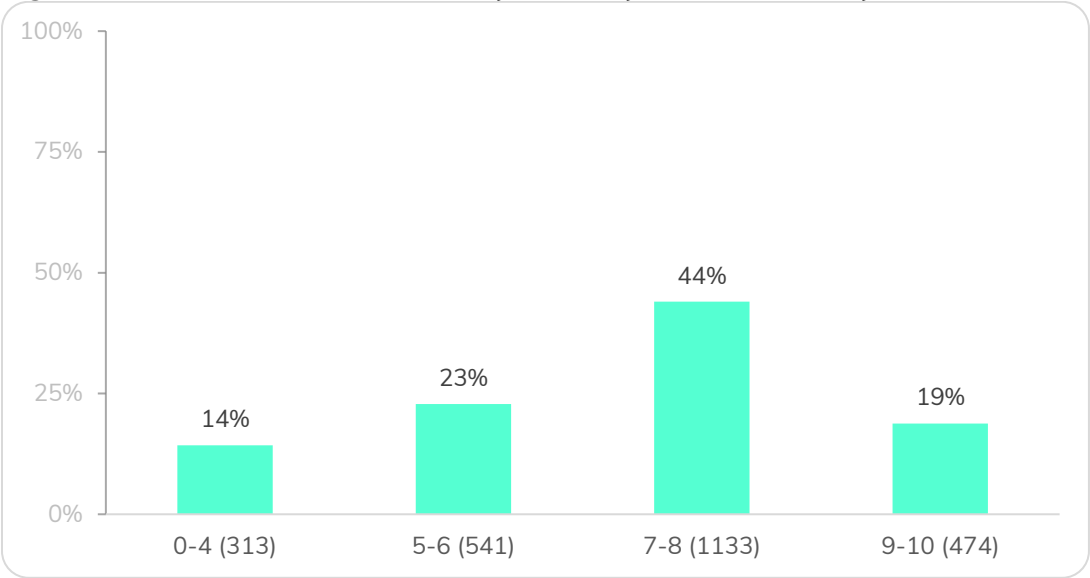


Figure 6: To what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

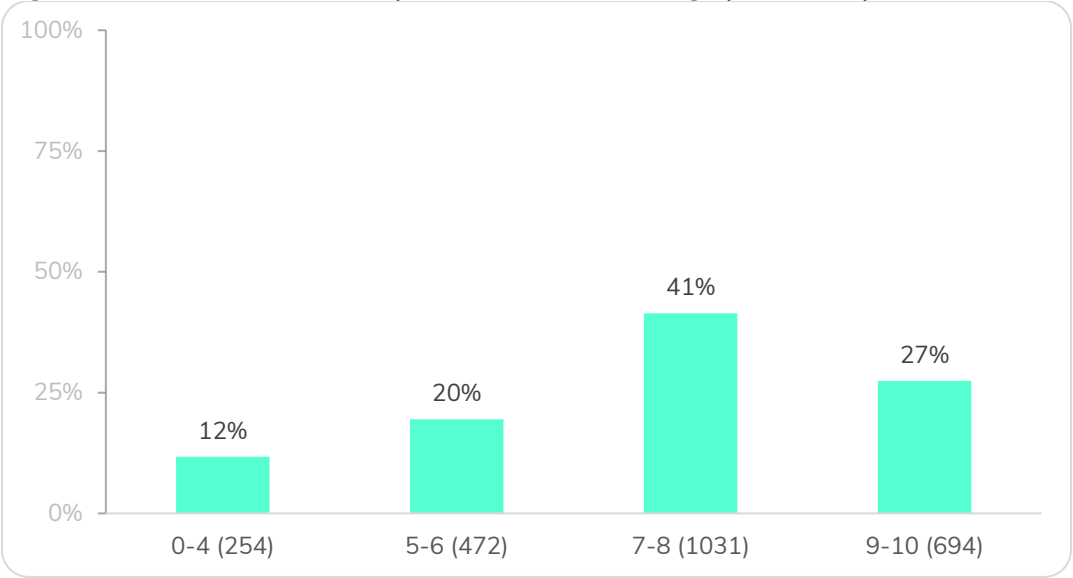


Figure 7: How happy did you feel yesterday?

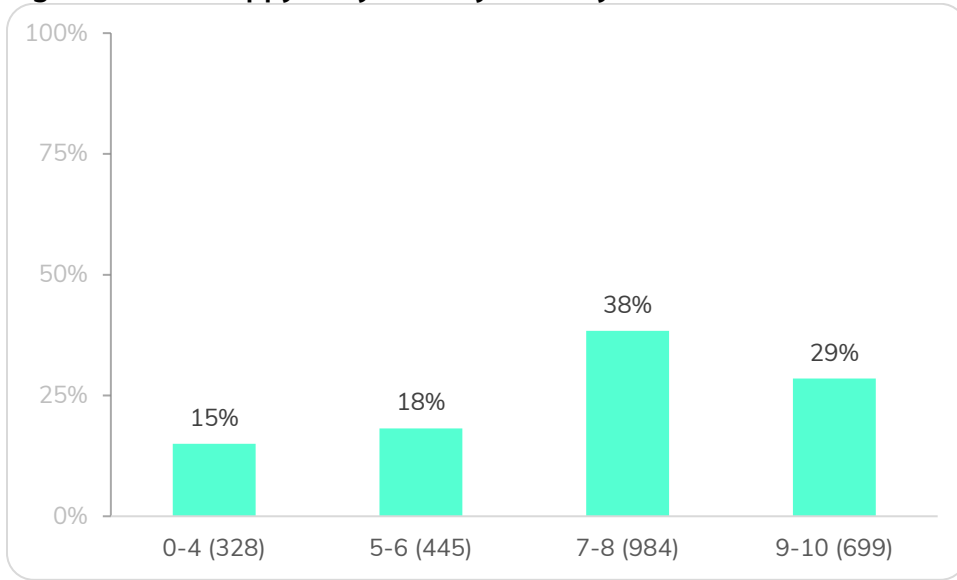
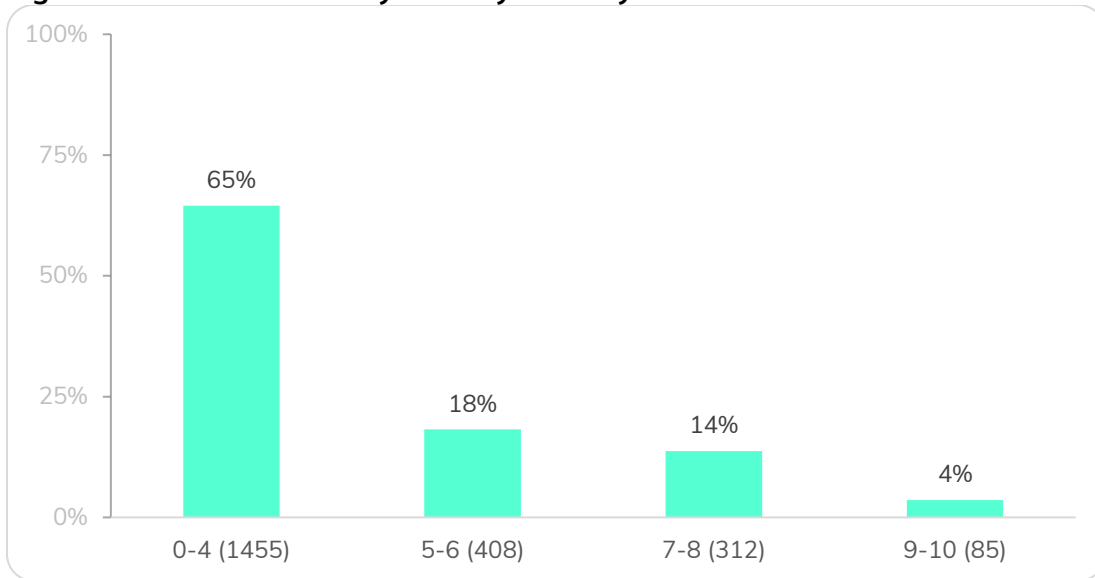


Figure 8: How anxious did you feel yesterday?

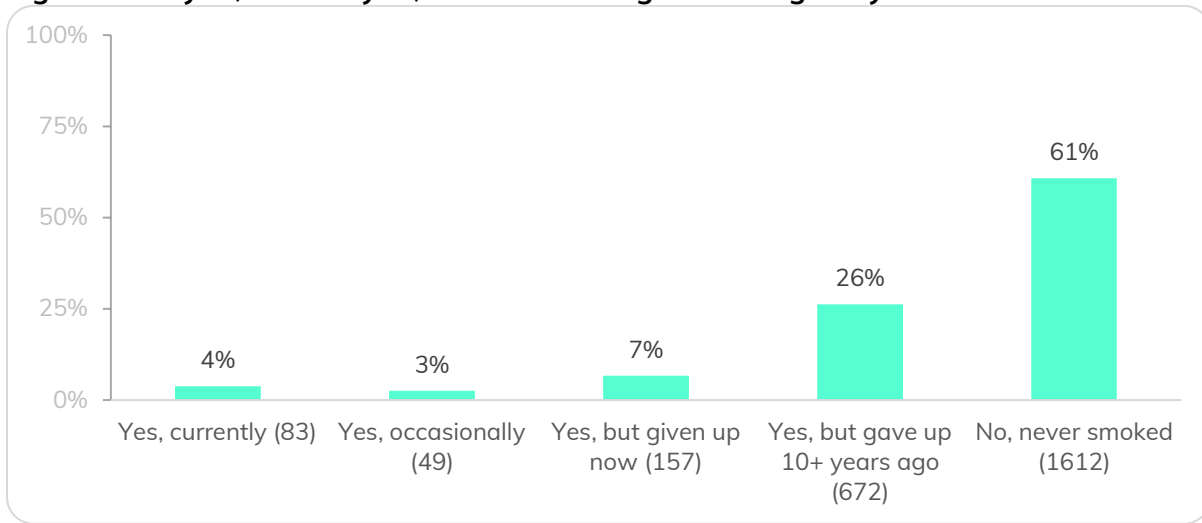


Lifestyle behaviours- smoking, vaping, alcohol use, diet and physical activity

Smoking and vaping

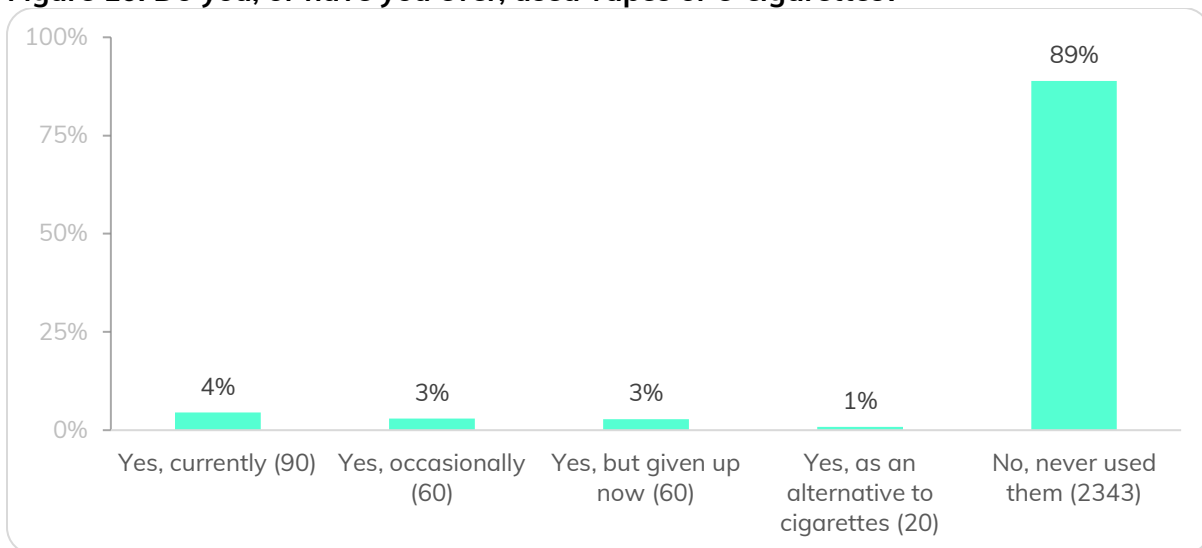
The vast majority of residents have either never smoked (61%) or quit ten or more years ago (26%), however 7% say they either currently smoke or occasionally do and a further 7% say they have given up within the last 10 years.

Figure 9: Do you, or have you, ever smoked cigarettes regularly?



The proportion of people who have ever used vapes or e-cigarettes across the borough is relatively low, with 89% saying that they have never used them and a further 3% saying they have previously but no longer do so. Around 1 in 14 people (7%) say they are either current and occasional users and a further 1% say that they use them as an alternative to smoking cigarettes.

Figure 10: Do you, or have you ever, used vapes or e-cigarettes?



Alcohol use

Around a quarter (23%) of people said they drink alcohol only infrequently (monthly or less) or not at all, while one in three (30%) report drinking 2-3 times a week and a further 18% told us they drink 4 or more times a week.

The majority of people drink 5 units or less when they do drink, while around a fifth (20%) said they drink 10 or more units. 3% of respondents said they drink more than 20 units when they have an alcoholic drink. Two thirds (63%) of people told us that they had not drunk 14 units in any week over the past month, however one in eight (12%) said they had done so every week and almost one in five (18%) drank that amount in 3 weeks or every week in the past month.

Figure 11: How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?

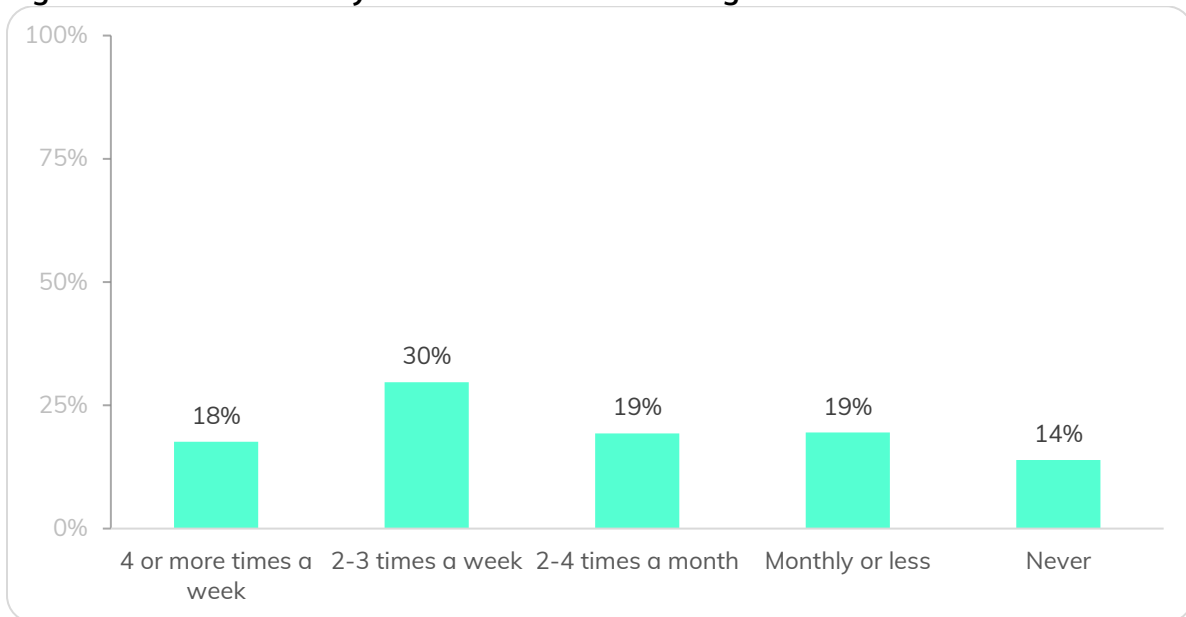


Figure 12: Roughly, how many units of alcohol do you drink on a day when you are drinking?

As a guide: Bottle of beer/lager (1 pint/568ml) 4% = 2.3 units. Standard glass of wine (175ml) 12% = 2.5 units. Single shot of spirits (40ml) 40% = 1 unit.

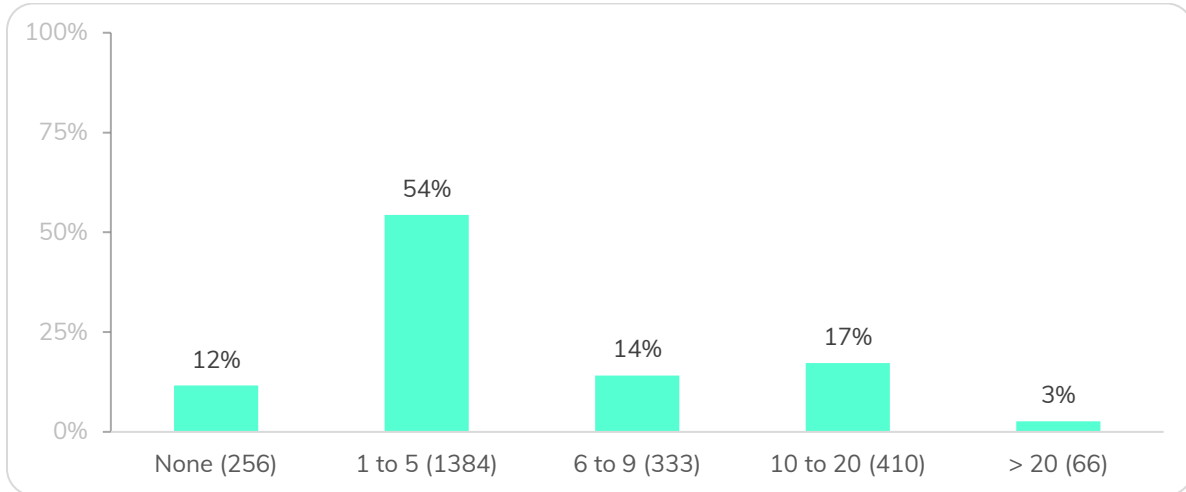
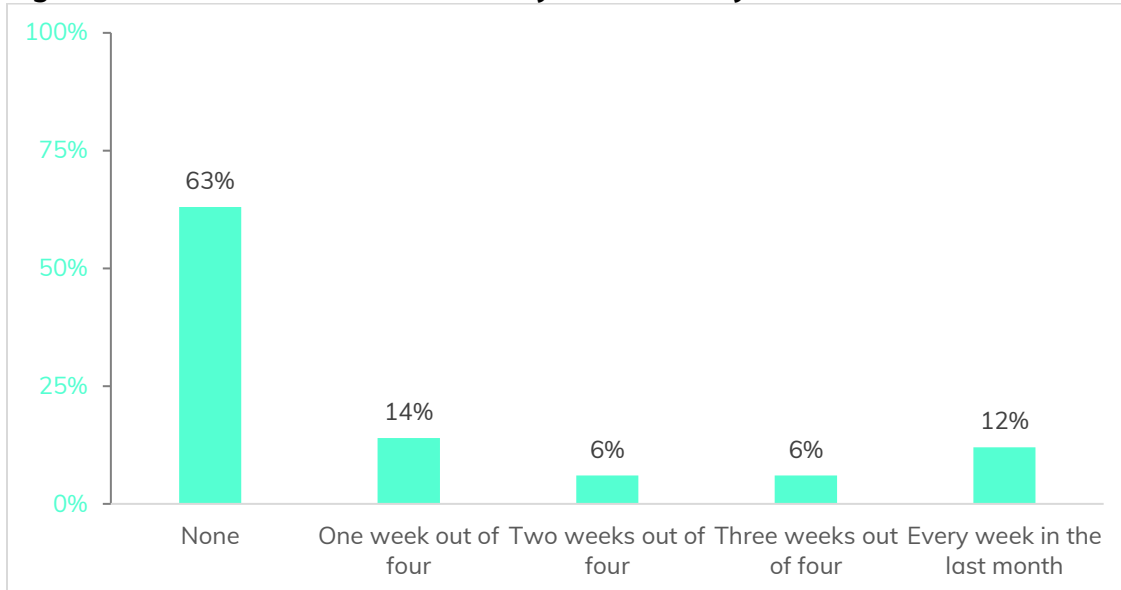


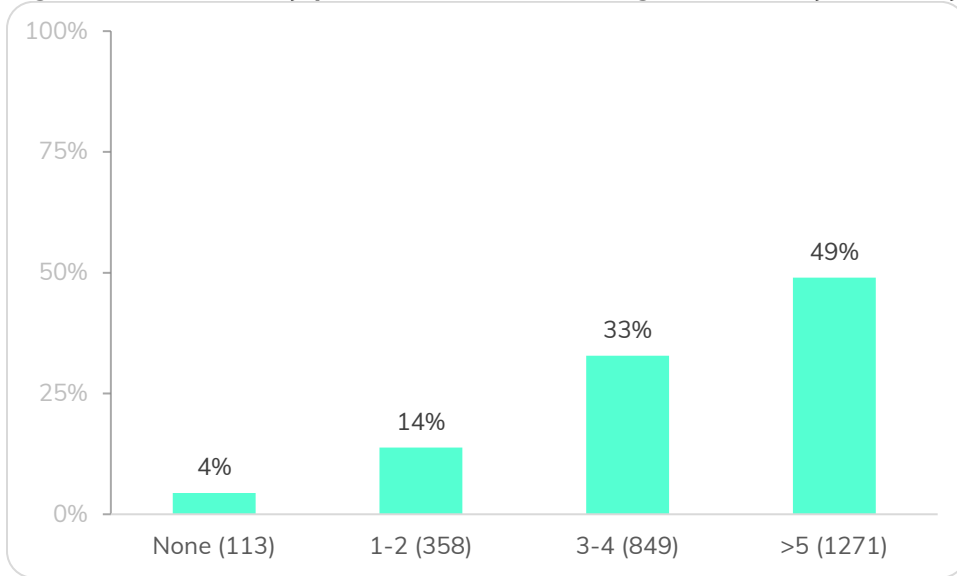
Figure 13: In the last month, how many weeks have you drunk 14 or more units?



Diet

Half of respondents (49%) reported eating at least the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables on the previous day, whilst only 4% told us that they had not had any. Around one in five (18%) said they had two portions or less.

Figure 14: How many portions of fruit and vegetables did you have yesterday?



Physical activity

One third of residents (31%) told us they undertake at least 150 minutes of moderately intensive exercise each week, whilst a further 41% said they do between 30-150 minutes each week. Just over a quarter (28%) report doing 30 minutes or less each week with half of these (15%) saying they do no exercise at all.

We find a similar picture in relation to regular walking, with one third saying they walk for at least 10 minutes every day and 13% saying they either do not walk for 10 minutes or more at all or just once per week. Around a half of people said they walk for at least 10 minutes between twice and six times each week.

Just over one third (36%) of residents told us they do no muscle strengthening exercises, whilst half said they did so through everyday tasks such as digging or carrying shopping. Dedicated muscle strengthening exercising such as pilates, dumbbells and using weight machines were undertaken by between 13-18% of residents.

Figure 15: How much regular, moderately intensive physical activity lasting ten minutes or more do you do each week? e.g. something that raises your heart rate and makes you sweat – such as cycling, brisk walking, fitness activities or sports

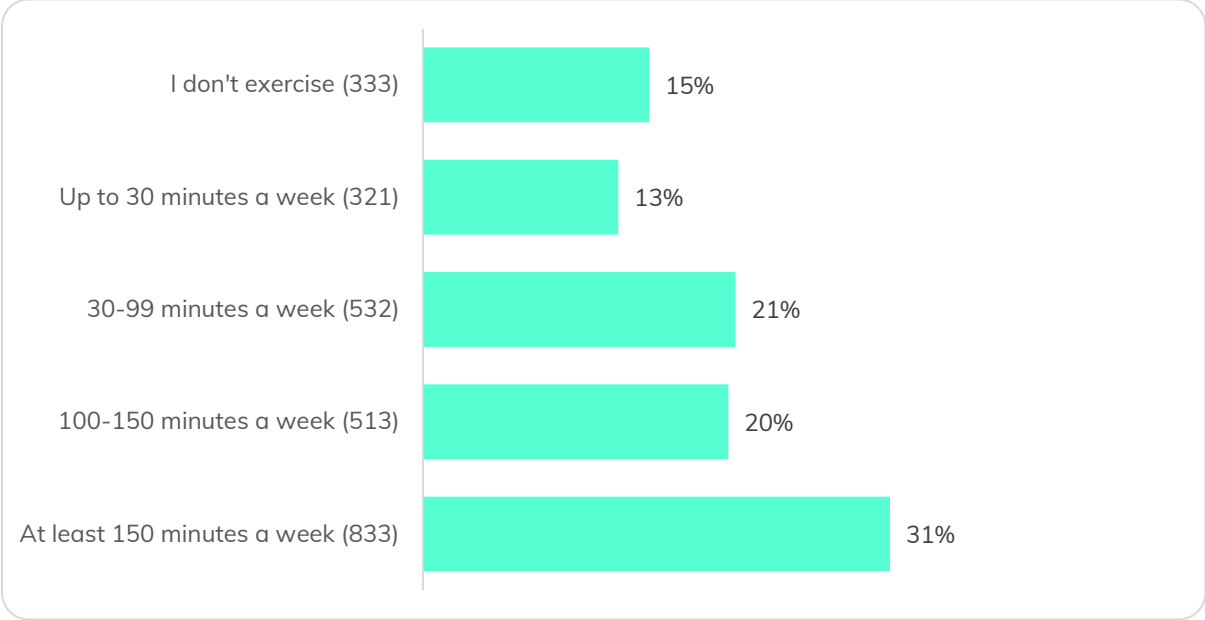
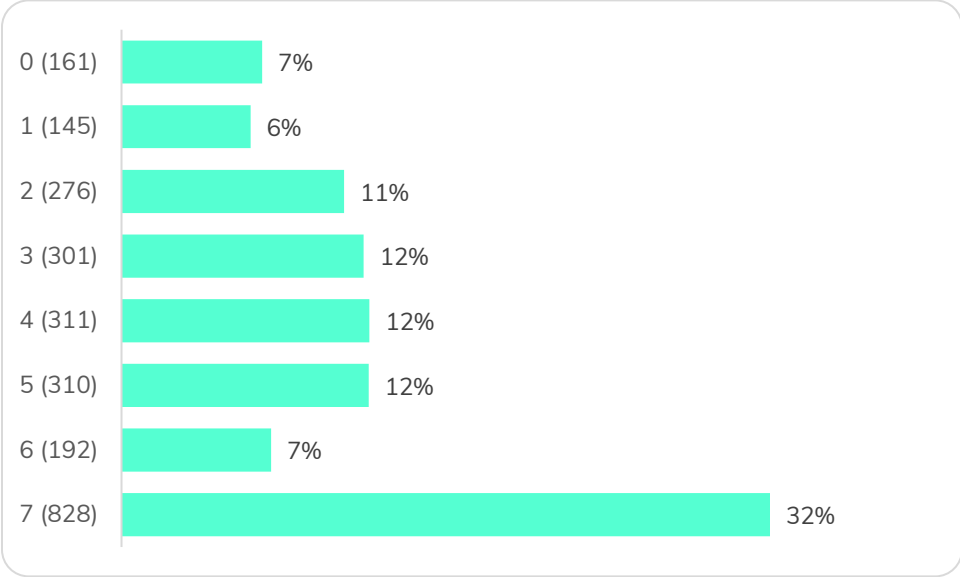


Figure 16: In the past 7 days, on how many days did you do a walk lasting at least ten minutes?



Around one third (36%) of respondents indicated that they walked for up to half an hour on average, with a further third (35%) stating that their walks averaged between 31 minutes and an hour. One in ten people told us that they typically walked for over 2 hours on each day where they walked for more than 10 minutes.

Figure 17: On days you walked more than 10 minutes, how long was each walk on average?

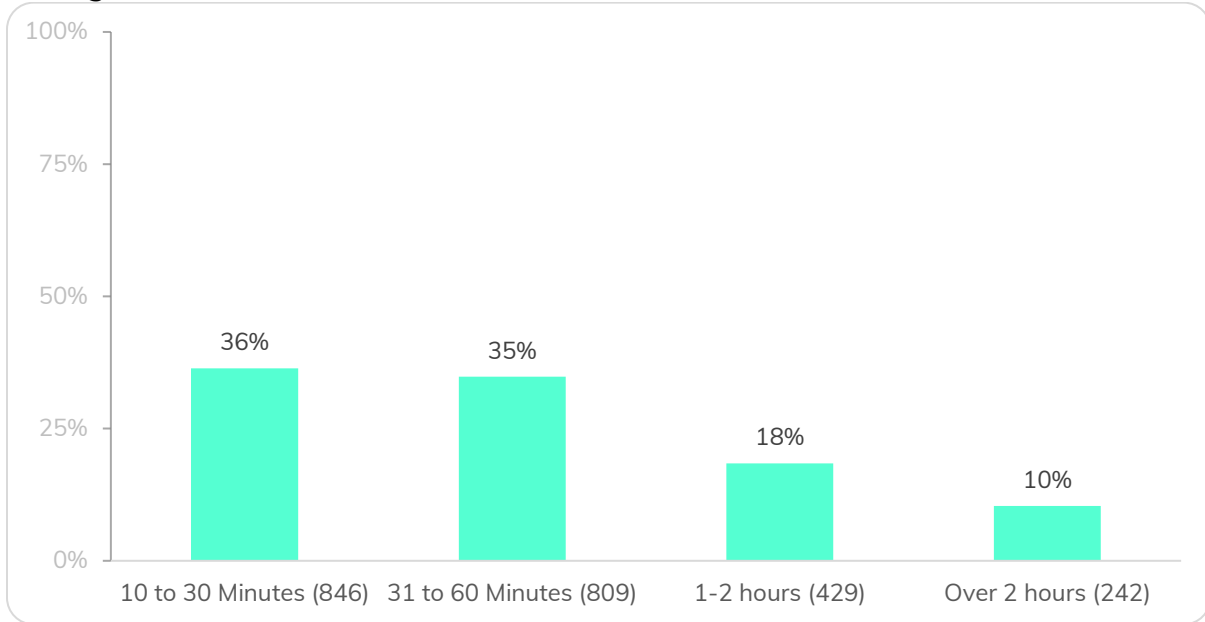
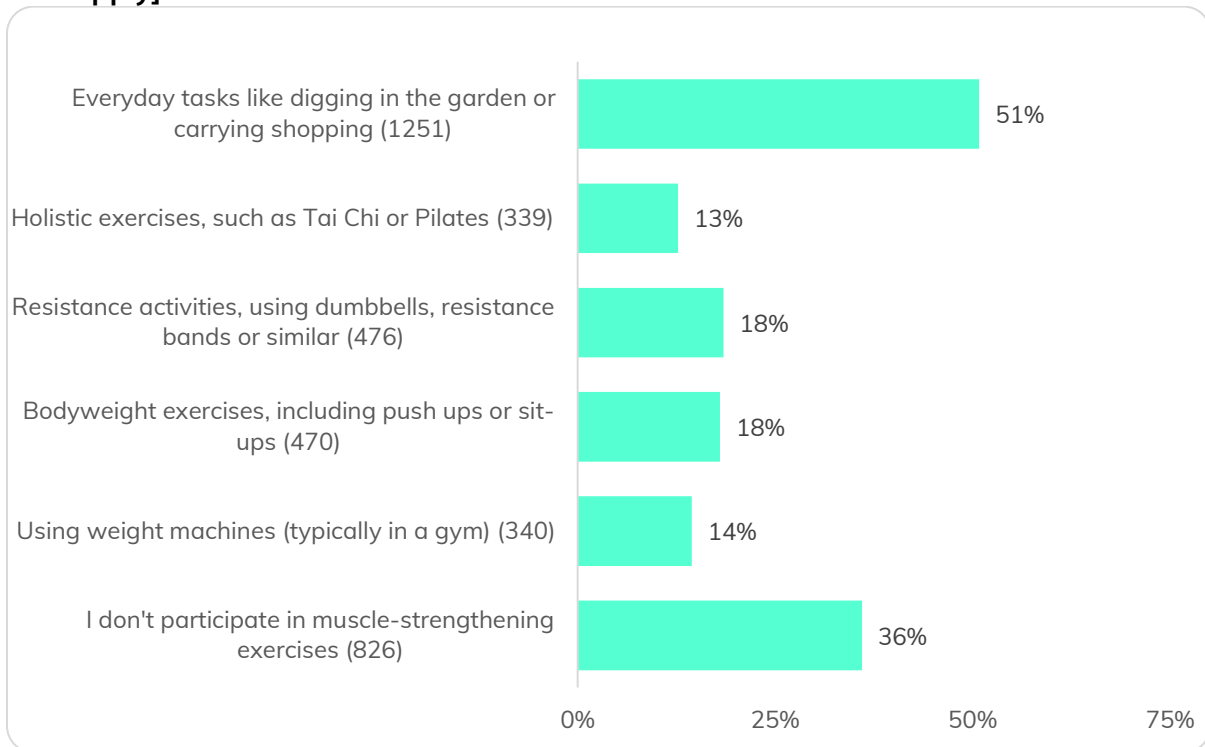


Figure 18: Do you regularly undertake muscle strengthening exercise such as: [select all that apply]

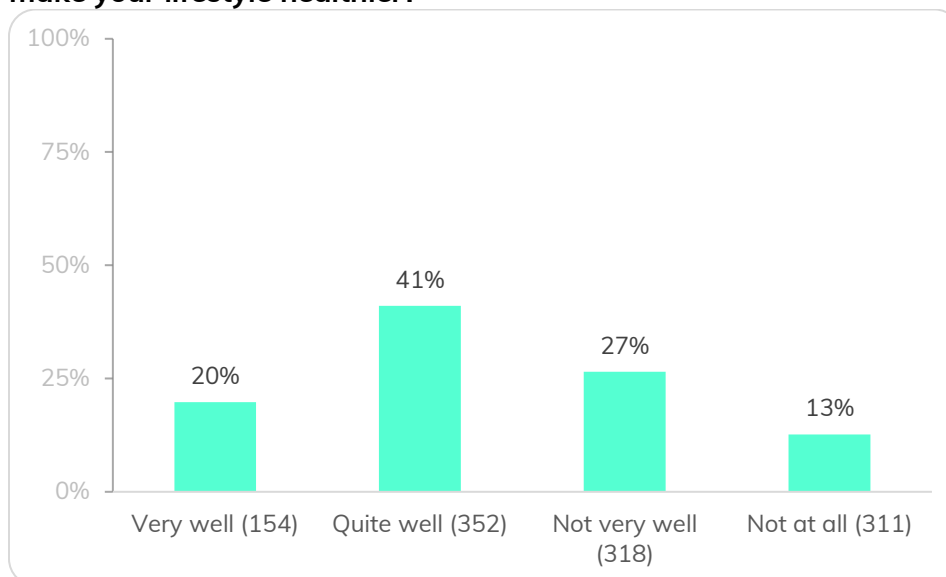


Accessing health and lifestyle services and information

Accessing health and lifestyle support and information

Although the majority (61%) of people said they felt well informed – either very well or quite well informed – about where to access information and support to improve their lifestyle, around one quarter said they did not feel very well informed and 13% said they did not know at all where to go for this.

Figure 19: How well informed do you feel about sources of support and information to make your lifestyle healthier?



When asked where they look for information, the vast majority of respondents said they turned to the internet for answers, including social media and YouTube as well as the NHS website. A small number of those searching on the internet named the council's website as a source of information. A lot of respondents also named their GP, health centre, or doctors more generally as their preferred source of information.

Several respondents derived information from the friends or others in their household, as well as leisure centres and gyms. Smaller numbers named newspapers, podcasts or books as sources of healthy lifestyle guidance.

Choosing and using lifestyle services

One third of people said they are a member of a fitness club, organisation or class, while two thirds were not. Of those who were, half of them told us they are members of sports centres or private gyms with the use of council-run facilities was considerably lower. The vast majority of people had never used them, with between 1% and 5% of people saying they were regular users and between 1% and 6% saying they did so infrequently. For each council leisure centre, between 78% and 97% of people said that they had never used this particular one. Of the 13 leisure centres listed, six of them had never been used by at least 90% of respondents. Two thirds of people had visited at least one leisure centre, whilst one third of respondents (32%) indicated that they had never used any of the leisure centres listed.

Figure 20: Are you a member of a fitness club, organisation or class?

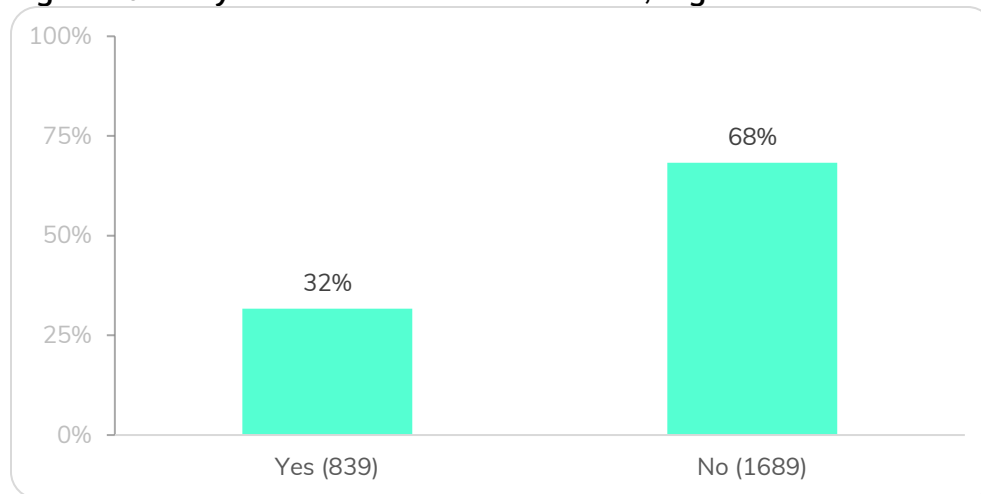
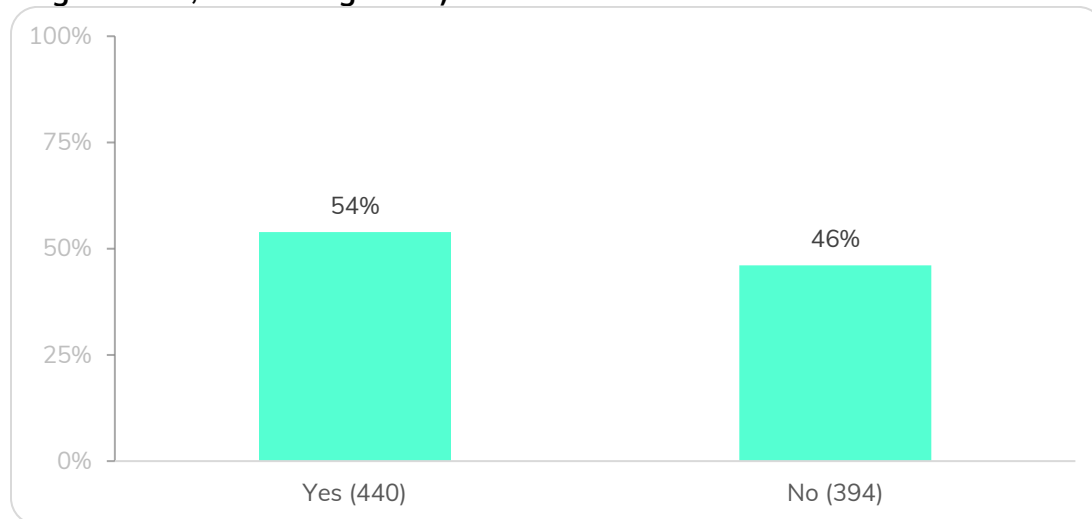


Figure 21: If yes, do you belong/attend a private gym or sports centre such as (PureGym, Virgin Active, Powerleague etc)?



We asked people to rank what mattered most to people in choosing lifestyle services, with a range of responses presented. Each factor was ranked from 1 (most important) to 8 (least important) and the average scores for each are listed below. Cost and affordability and the distance of the service from people’s home or work were by far the most frequently top ranked service features, with average scores of 2 and 2.5 respectively. Conversely, being accessible by public transport was most frequently ranked least important – with an average score of 7.2. Facilities for children was also viewed as generally unimportant with an average score of 6.4.

Figure 22: What is important to you in choosing lifestyle services? Please rank in order of priority (1 most important, 8 least important)

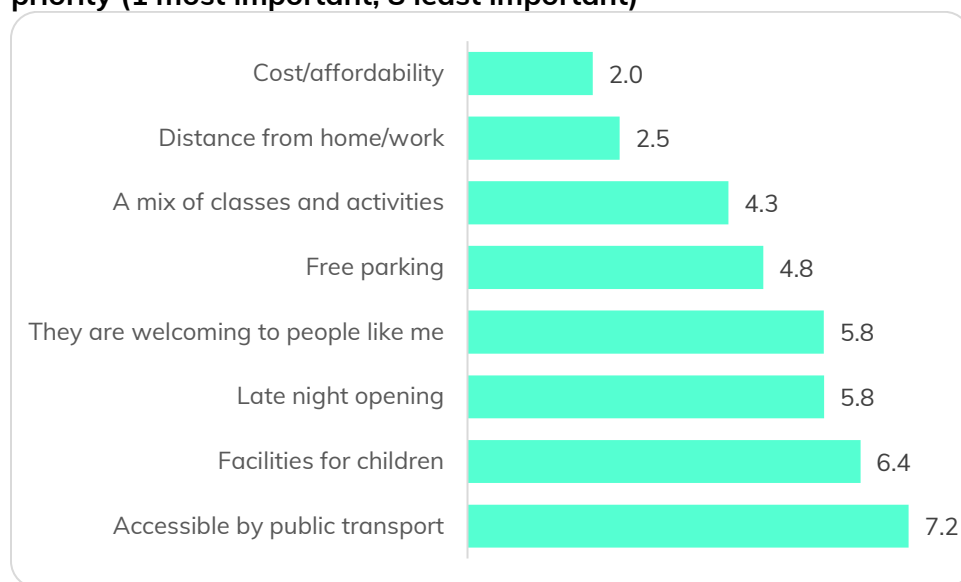


Table 23: Do you now, or have you ever used council leisure centres?

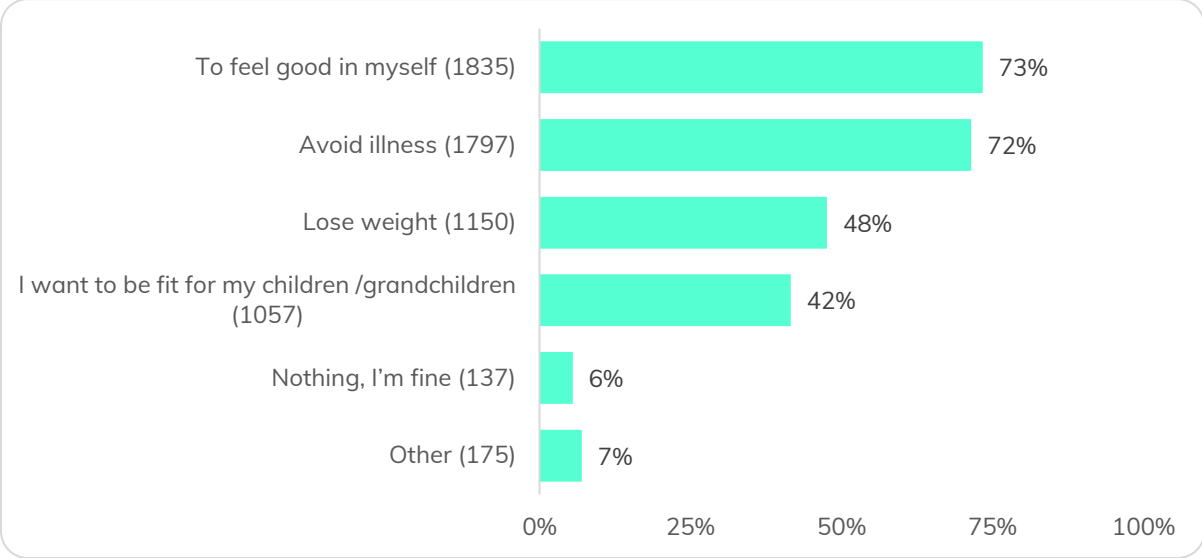
Centre	Regularly	Irregularly	Rarely	Never
Alsager Leisure Centre	3%	4%	12%	81%
Barony Sports Complex	1%	1%	2%	97%
Congleton Leisure Centre	3%	3%	6%	88%
Crewe Lifestyle Centre	5%	5%	8%	83%
Holmes Chapel Leisure Centre	2%	1%	3%	94%
Knutsford Leisure Centre	3%	2%	3%	92%

Macclesfield Leisure Centre	4%	6%	12%	78%
Middlewich Leisure Centre	1%	1%	2%	96%
Nantwich Swimming Pool	4%	5%	11%	82%
Poynton Leisure Centre	3%	2%	2%	93%
Sandbach Leisure Centre	2%	3%	7%	88%
Shavington Leisure Centre	2%	2%	6%	90%
Wilmslow Leisure Centre	2%	5%	8%	84%

Motivational factors for healthier lifestyle behaviours

We asked people which, of a range of possible options, might make people want to improve their health and fitness and two motivating factors were far more frequently selected by Cheshire East’s residents. Around three quarters of people said they were motivated by avoiding illness (72%) and feeling good about themselves (73%), significantly more than the next most frequent choices – losing weight (48%) and being fit for my children and grandchildren (42%). Only 6% of people said they were fine and did not require motivation.

Figure 24: What things make you want to improve your health and fitness? You can select more than option



Other reasons given

The main reason respondents looked to improve their health and fitness were related to improving or maintaining their physical health, including keeping mobile and healthy as they got older, avoiding illness and recovering from it. Longevity, adding healthy years to their lives and overall quality of life were named as motivators linked to this.

Mental health was also mentioned by several respondents, recognising the positive effect of physical health and exercise on mental health issues and energy levels.

A few of the respondents wanted to improve their health to take on particular challenges, responsibilities or carry out certain tasks – including caring for family members, sports competitions or gardening.

Lastly, a small number of respondents were aiming to build muscle, simply enjoyed exercising or valued the social aspect of it.

“I want to live a happy and healthy life with my husband and children”

“Keep my health as long as possible. In this moment I am scared of getting sick because I am worried about the NHS conditions and I don't feel safe enough.”

“Keep fit and healthy in my 70's and 80's”

“Had major accident this year fractured both arms so need to recover my fitness”

“Physical activity is the only thing that helps me fight depression”

“Keeping fit to care for my husband and elderly mother”

“Still garden. Still get around.”

“Tone and build muscle”

“Enjoyment of physical activity”

“Socialise with my community”

The impact of COVID-19 on people’s lives and lifestyle

To help us understand what impact COVID-19 has had on people’s health and wellbeing, we asked them what the effect had been on their physical and mental health and the difference it had made to a series of lifestyle behaviours.

Although around half of people we heard from told us that the pandemic had not made any difference to their physical or mental health, a third (35%) said that COVID-19 had had an adverse effect. Only one in ten people said it had improved their physical or their mental health.

The impact of the pandemic on people’s different lifestyle behaviours tended to be negligible for many, with between 49% and 92% of respondents saying it had made no difference. Smoking was least likely to have been impacted by COVID-19, with 92% of people saying it made no difference – though this figure will include the significant number of people who don’t smoke anyway. Nonetheless, some people clearly used the pandemic to improve their smoking behaviour as people were four times more likely to say it was ‘much better’ (4%) than ‘much worse’ (1%). Socialising was the behaviour which was most adversely affected by COVID-19, with 41% of respondents saying it had made their lives ‘slightly worse’ or ‘much worse’. Generally, across relationships, diet, smoking and alcohol consumption, we saw that a relatively small proportion of people said it had made things worse and a similarly small proportion said it had made their lives better.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, how would you say the following aspects of your life have been affected?

Figure 25: Physical health

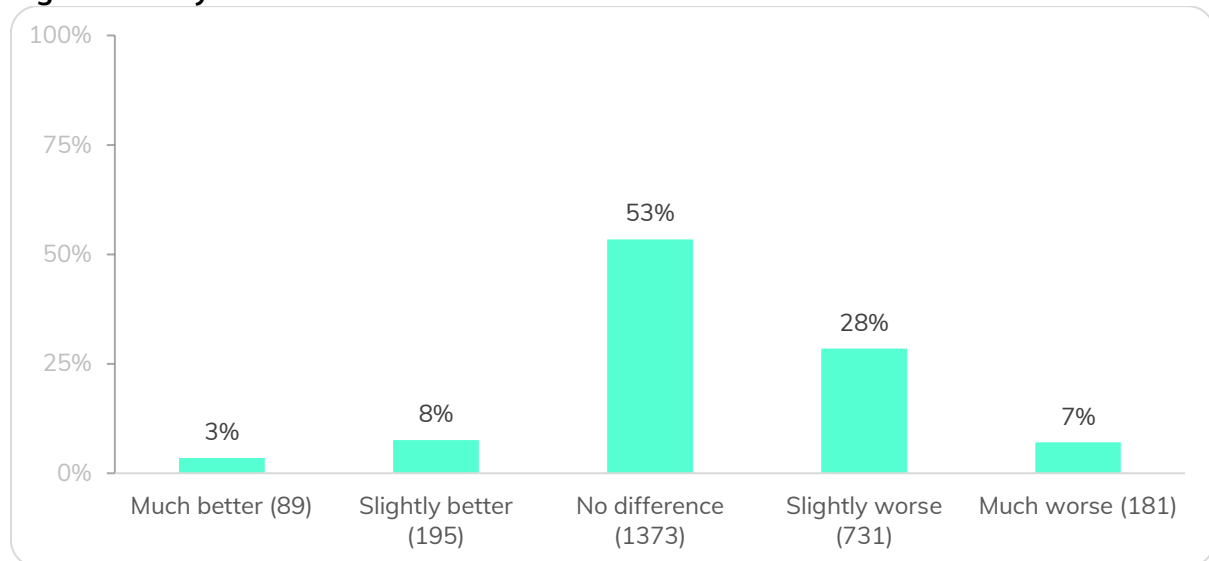
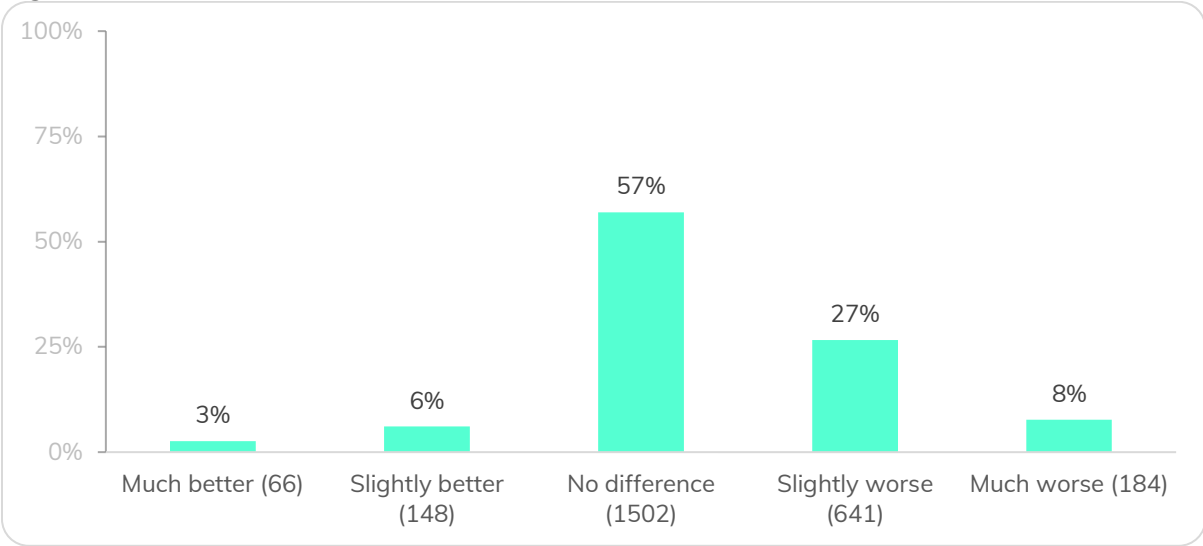


Figure 26: Mental Health



Now thinking about your lifestyle since the COVID-19 pandemic, which aspects have been affected?

Figure 27: Socialising

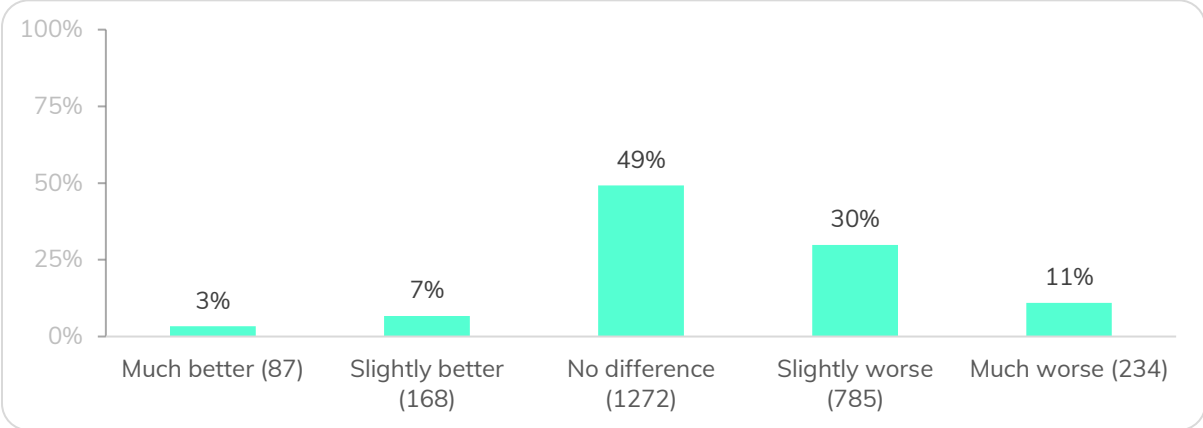


Figure 28: My relationships (with partner, family or friends)

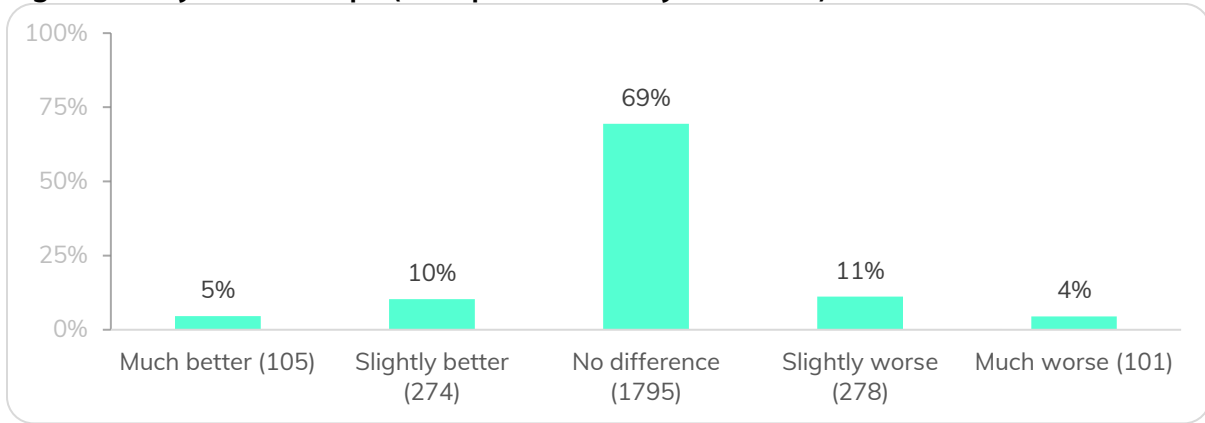


Figure 29: Smoking

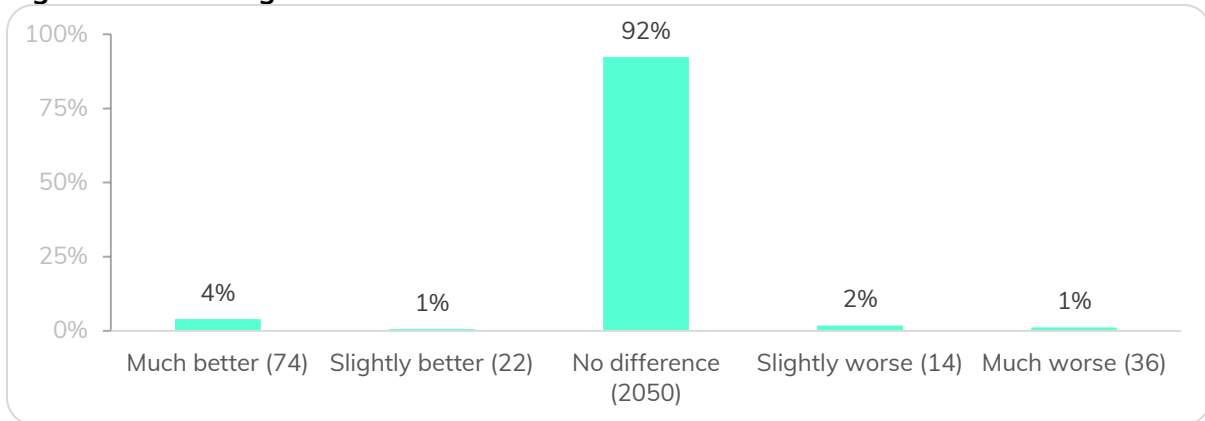


Figure 30: Diet

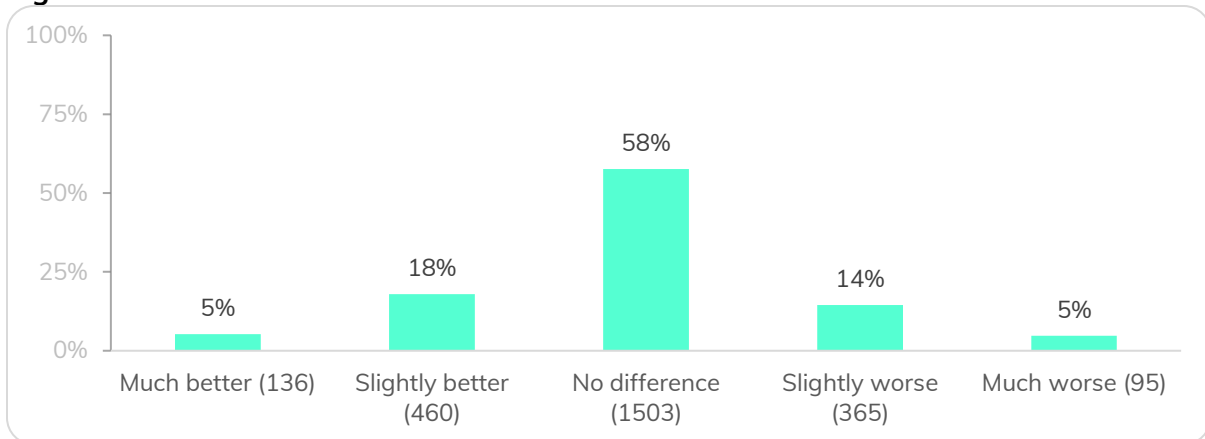


Figure 31: Physical activity

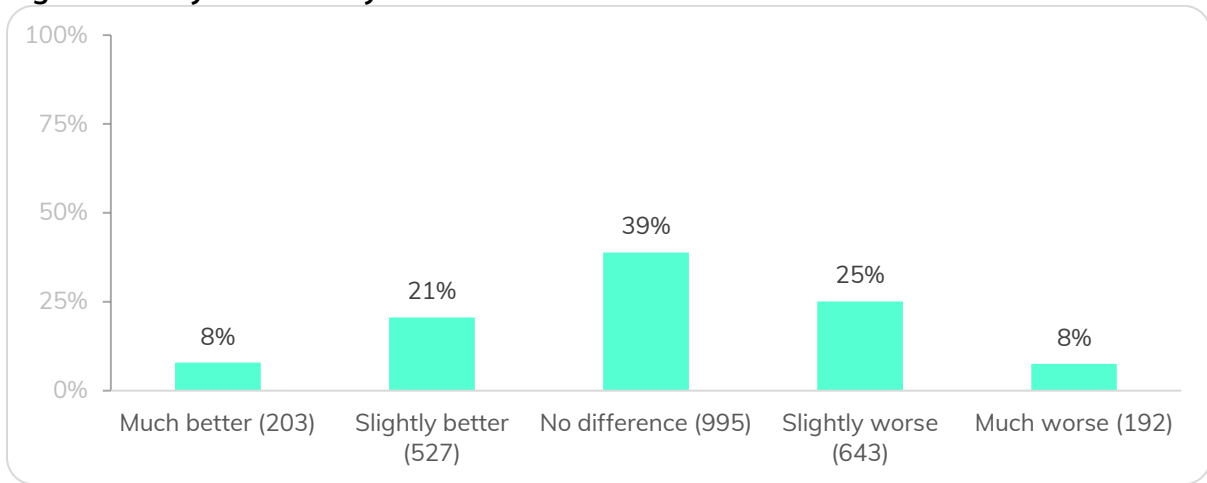


Figure 32: Alcohol consumption

