



April 2013

Welcome and Thank You!

Welcome to this edition of NHATS and you, a newsletter designed especially for NHATS participants.

NHATS is beginning to provide new and important information about older adults in America in 2011.

Thanks to you and more than 8,000 others like you who joined us in this important research study, we are working to understand how daily life changes as we age.

Your responses are being put together with those of other NHATS respondents so that researchers can describe the daily lives of older adults in ways never before possible.

With data from our first and second round of interviews with participants, we will be able to show for the first time how daily life changes with age.

It is only through research studies like NHATS that we will learn how to improve life for all of us as we get older. Thank you for participating!

Why Does Walking Speed Matter?

During the NHATS interview, participants are asked to walk across the room — about 10 feet — at their normal pace. This part of the interview gives us information on usual walking speed for older Americans.

How fast or slow someone walks — even over short distances — tells us important information about future health. Other studies with small

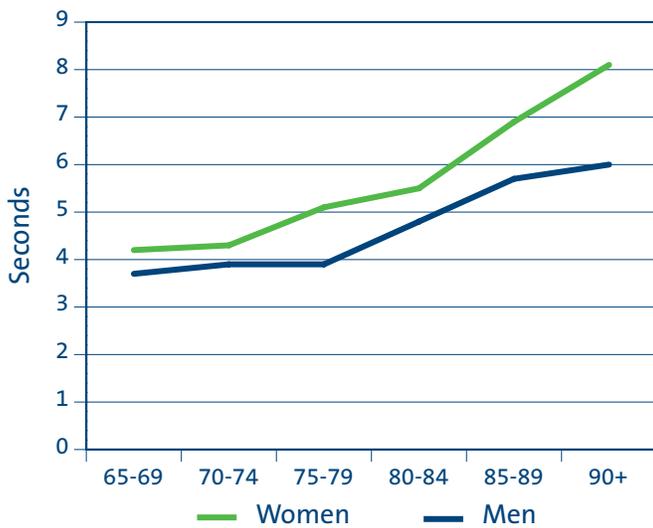
groups of older people have shown that walking speed predicts who goes into a hospital or nursing home and who develops difficulty with household activities. Some researchers think testing walking speed is so important that it should be part of a regular physical examination of older people by their doctors.

Keeping Up and Slowing Down

Why do some people slow down and others keep on truckin'? What does keeping up the pace mean for your health and quality of life? Will the country see changes in the number of “fast” and “slow” walkers as the Baby Boom enters later life? These are questions that NHATS will be able to answer in the future. From your first round of interviews, we were able to see more clearly than ever before that walking speed changes with age — for both men and women.



Figure 1. Time it takes to walk about 10 feet by age and gender (in seconds)



Men in their late 60s and early 70s typically walk 10 feet in under 4 seconds. At that pace, they could walk a football field in about 2 minutes. By age 90, that 10-foot walk takes about 6 seconds. Women in their late 60s and early 70s start off slower than men — taking just over 4 seconds to walk across the room. Around age 80, pace begins to slow significantly. A typical woman in her 90s takes about 8 seconds to walk that same 10 feet.

National data like these are essential to develop guidelines for what is typical for men and women at certain ages. Like weight, blood pressure, and bone density, doctors may be able to use walking speed to identify patients who may soon need help with getting around. Like many other conditions, early identification may be key to preventing decline.



Spotlight on Medicare

Everyone participating in NHATS is covered by the Medicare program for health care costs such as hospital stays and prescription drugs. Some also have coverage for doctor visits and other health care costs.

By being a part of NHATS, you are helping the country better understand how the Medicare program works for people who are age 65 and older.

Coming Soon...

Researchers across the country are beginning to work with NHATS to better understand many important topics. As findings are published, we will make these results available in future newsletters.

Thank you for your continued participation in NHATS!

www.mynhats.org

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