

Come & Try

Increasing Physical Activity in Older Adults

Rationale:

What is physical activity?

Physical activity is any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in an expenditure of energy. This can be movement that is carried out during work, recreation, exercise and organised sport.¹

Why is physical activity important?²

It is good for your body

- Helps to control: weight, blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes, bone and joint problems (e.g. arthritis)
- Reduces the risk of: heart disease, stroke and some cancers
- Helps to manage pain
- Helps to maintain and increase joint movement
- Helps to prevent falls and injury

It is good for your mind

- Reduces stress and anxiety
- Improves concentration
- Improves self-confidence
- Reduces feelings of sadness

It makes you look and feel better

- Gives you more energy
- Helps you sleep better
- Helps you to relax
- Helps you to meet people and make new friends
- Is fun
- Tones your body

¹ *Be Active Australia: A Framework for Health Sector Action for Physical Activity*, NPHP, Melbourne, 2005.

² *Choose Health: Be Active - A physical activity guide for older Australians*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia and the Repatriation Commission, 2005.

How much physical activity - what are the recommendations?

Australia has physical activity guidelines for adults and physical activity recommendations for 5-12 years olds and 12-18 year olds. These guidelines and recommendations have been developed for the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing and can be found at www.healthyactive.gov.au.

The following are the National Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults:

1. Think of movement as an opportunity, not an inconvenience.
2. Be active every day in as many ways as you can.
3. Put together at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on most, preferable all, days.
4. If you can, also enjoy some regular, vigorous activity for extra health and fitness.

What are the trends?

- In Australia, rates of physical activity are declining across all age groups.³
- Just over half (56.8 percent) of the Australian adult population is achieving the recommended amount of physical activity for health gains (150 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week) and in Queensland, only 45 percent are sufficiently physically active.³
- Older Australians are currently the least active of any population group and evidence shows that participation in physical activity tends to decline with age.³

What does the evidence say?

- Amongst the elderly, physical activity is a positive approach to extending years of active independent life, reducing disability and improving quality of life.⁴

³ Bauman, A., Ford, I. and Armstrong, T. 2001. *Trends in population levels of reported physical activity in Australia, 1997, 1999 and 2000*, Canberra: Australian Sports Commission.

⁴ Resnick, B. Across the ageing continuum - motivating older adults to exercise. *Advance for Nurse Practitioners*. 2005; September:37-40.

- Despite the potential benefits of having an active lifestyle, it is difficult to encourage older adults to become physically active and sustain this. Studies have shown that providing group-based interventions that focus on increasing confidence and overcoming physical and environmental barriers can achieve and maintain high participation rates.⁵
- Evidence also suggests that physical activity interventions/programs that are moderate in intensity, are simple and convenient to engage in, are relatively inexpensive, are non-competitive and contain a social component, are particularly appealing to older adults.⁶

⁵ Taylor, A. H., Cable, N.T., Faulkner, G., Hillsdon, M., Narici, M. and Ven Der Bij, A.K. Physical activity and older adults: A review of the health benefits and the effectiveness of interventions. *Journal of Sports Science*. 2004;22:703-725.

⁶ King, A. Interventions to promote physical activity by older adults. *The Journal of Gerontology*. 2001; October, 56A:36-46.