



Physical activity and the health of the elderly: Benefits, types and barriers

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Abstract

Physical activity is any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure. Physical activity is any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure. Some of the benefits of Physical Activity helps maintain the ability to live independently and reduces the risk of falling and fracturing bones, reduces the risk of dying from coronary heart disease and of developing high blood pressure, colon cancer, and diabetes. Also to the elderly it helps maintains independent living, Better cardiovascular health, May assist cognitive function, Reduces anxiety and depression, helps with flexibility, improves strength, and improves bone density. For some elderly, access to and the cost of acceptable exercise opportunities limit engagement in physical activities. Social and environmental factors have also been identified as impacting older adults' engagement in physical activity young ones should encourage them to participate in physical activity during their leisure time.

Keywords: physical activity, elderly, health

Introduction

Physical activity is any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure. Physical activity refers to all movement including during leisure time, for transport to get to and from places, or as part of a person's work. Both moderate- and vigorous-intensity physical activity improve health. Popular ways to be active include walking, cycling, wheeling, sports, active recreation and play, and can be done at any level of skill and for enjoyment by everybody. Physical activity is any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure (World Health organization, 2023). "Exercise" and "physical activity" are frequently used interchangeably and generally refer to physical activity performed during leisure time with the primary purpose of improving or maintaining physical fitness, physical performance, or health. However, physical activity is not exactly the same concept as exercise. Exercise is defined as a subcategory of physical activity that is planned, structured, repetitive, and purposeful in the sense that the improvement or maintenance of one or more components of physical fitness is the objective. Conversely, physical activity includes exercise but may also be unplanned, unstructured, random and non-purposeful carried out for a multitude of reasons (Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health, 2009). Regular physical activity is known to improve health, and reduce an individual's risk of chronic diseases and death. Physical inactivity has a major health effect worldwide. Thirty-one percent of individuals aged over 15 years are considered to be physically inactive. Four to five million deaths per year could be averted if the global population was more physically active. Of the deaths attributable to physical inactivity, 2.6 million are in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). While physical inactivity is more prevalent in high- and middle-income countries, even in low-income countries it is among the top ten risk factors contributing to death (Physiopedia 2023) [3].

Benefits of physical activity

- Helps maintain the ability to live independently and reduces the risk of falling and fracturing bones.
- Reduces the risk of dying from coronary heart disease and of developing high blood pressure, colon cancer, and diabetes.
- Can help reduce blood pressure in some people with hypertension.
- Helps people with chronic, disabling conditions improve their stamina and muscle strength.
- Reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression and fosters improvements in mood and feelings of well-being.
- Helps maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints.
- Helps control joint swelling and pain associated with arthritis.

As an elderly individual, regular physical activity is one of the most important things one can engage in for one's health. It can prevent or delay many of the health problems that seem to come with age. It also helps ones muscles grow stronger so one can keep doing ones day-to-day activities without becoming dependent on others (Centers for Disease Control Prevention 2022) [4, 5]. Physical activity is one of the most important activities to maintain independence among the elderly. Despite this, becoming more sedentary with age is often the reality. Staying fit and healthy for as long as possible help improve happiness and quality of life of the elderly.

Benefits of exercise for the elderly

Maintains independent livin, Better cardiovascular health, May assist cognitive function, Reduces anxiety and depression, Helps with flexibility, Improves strength, Improves bone density, Prevents falls, Maintains hobbies, Assists weight loss, Forms a cornerstone habit, Improves sleep, Sustains social connections, Increases confidence, Increases lifespan, It's fun.

Types of physical activities for elderly people

- Gardening or yoga
- Water aerobics or swimming
- Brisk walking
- Mowing the lawn
- Attending dance or aerobics class

Factors Influencing Participation in physical activity among the elderly

Older adults with low levels of physical activity identified issues such as poor health, lifetime inactivity, low motivation, and a perception that decreased activity is to be expected or inevitable as barriers to exercise (Rai *et al.*, 2020). For some, access to and the cost of acceptable exercise opportunities limit engagement in physical activities. Social and environmental factors have also been identified as impacting older adults' engagement in physical activity. The research claimed that senior adults may possibly face more constraints on physical activity, such as lack of time, interest, fear of falling, and injuries. This is mainly due to the chronic diseases associated with age, most particularly, physical disability and discomfort leading to health constraints. Senior adults of low socioeconomic status, women, and those with less disposable income are at greater risk of physical inactivity. Senior adults also report constraints that are more perceptual in nature, including lack of time, lack of motivation, misconceptions about PA, fear of injury, and lack of skill (Fang, Chen & Liao, 2023) ^[6]. The physical activity of older adults is reported to be affected by socio-demographic factors such as gender, age, educational level, and economic status (Browning, Sims, Kendig, & Teshuva 2009) ^[7]. Other factors included lack of daily access to a car, shortness of breath, joint pain, dislike of going out alone or in the evening, perceived lack of fitness, lack of energy, doubting that exercise can lengthen life, not belonging to a group and doubting that meeting new people is beneficial (Iain, Linda, Brian, Alison, Peter, Elizabeth, & Marion, 2004) ^[9].

Other factors include;

Discomfort and pain

One-half of elderly are not active due to discomfort and pain. Back pain, sore knees, heart conditions, and lung disorder can be barriers to exercise and limit motivation. Also, overweight and obesity can be major problems in influencing healthy activity in older adults.

Fear of injury

Injury is a very legitimate concern for the elderly. But a lack of exercise can cause general functional decline and balance issues.

Fixed income

Gym, health club memberships, and personal training can be expensive for a senior on a fixed income. Seniors may not feel that they have the means to exercise because of lack of extra funds.

Cognitive decline

Those who are experiencing memory loss or cognitive decline still may be physically healthy and capable of exercising.

Isolation

Most people, not only the elderly, are more successful at an exercise program if they workout with a partner. If your loved one has lost a spouse or their partner is physically disabled, they may lose their motivation to stay active. Sometimes older adults may feel vulnerable and unsafe walking alone (Chris 2019) ^[8].

Physical activity is recommendation for the elderly

- Do at least 150–300 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity;
- or at least 75–150 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity; or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity throughout the week
- Do muscle-strengthening activities at moderate or greater intensity that involve all major muscle groups on 2 or more days a week, as these provide additional health benefits.
- Increase moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity to more than 300 minutes; or do more than 150 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity; or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity throughout the week for additional health benefits.
- Limit the amount of time spent being sedentary. Replacing sedentary time with physical activity of any intensity (including light intensity) provides health benefits, and helps reduce the detrimental effects of high levels of sedentary behaviour on health, all adults and older adults should aim to do more than the recommended levels of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity.

Conclusion

Physical activity has so many health benefits in the life of an elderly ranging from Maintains independent living, better cardiovascular health, may assist cognitive function, reduces anxiety and depression, Helps with flexibility, Improves strength, Improves bone density, Prevents falls, Maintains hobbies, Assists weight loss, Forms a cornerstone habit, Improves sleep, Sustains social connections, Increases confidence, Increases lifespan and so on. Many factors can hinder them from engaging in physical activity this may include discomfort and pain, Fear of injury, fixed income and cognitive decline. Because of the various benefits of physical activity to the elderly, young ones should encourage them to always use their leisure time to participate in physical activity for their health.

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