



Sitting down to keep fit

WHEN keen runner and triathlon competitor Amanda Mallett turned her back on a 19-year career in financial services to

become a personal trainer she just assumed she would end up working with sportspeople like herself.

But nothing could be further from the truth.

Amanda's main client group has turned out to be the over 60s - in fact, her oldest pupil is a centenarian - and for the most part they exercise without even leaving the comfort of their chairs.

That's because Amanda is working as a champion of chair-based exercise in the Suffolk Coastal area, delivering

several community classes and a host of others in residential homes each week.

She's more than happy with the turn of events.

"I enjoy working with older

Older people are being encouraged to sit down and keep fit by taking part in an exercise programme that is gaining in popularity across the country. Sheena Grant reports

people," she says. "We have a bit more of a laugh."

Her initiation into chair-based exercise came when she completed a training course via Suffolk Coastal District Council.

"I had retrained as a personal trainer after 16 years in financial services and as I run and do triathlons I at first thought I would be training people like me," she says. "I was doing that when the opportunity to do this chair-based exercise programme came up."

Chair-based exercises are designed to help people build up their activity levels without putting unwanted strain on their hips, legs or arms. This makes them ideal for people with arthritis or osteoporosis, or who have had back, knee or hip surgery. Also, because the activities gently build up a person's fitness, they are suitable for people who have very low levels of fitness.

The sessions improve flexibility, mobility, balance and strength and have the added benefit of giving people the chance to socialise while staying active, helping them to maintain independence, health and well-being.

While some of Amanda's hour-long classes are fully chair-based others, which have 'younger' clients in their 60s and 70s, may include a bit of standing exercise.

"We spend 10-15 minutes in the chair warming up and depending on the group we will either stay in the chair for the full 60 minutes or do some standing work," she says. "The sessions include strengthening work, music and balancing and finish with flexibility at the end."

"I can see a difference between when people start to come and how they improve later on. People tell me they are able to get up from their chair easier and one lady said she was able to clean the bottom of her oven now - although it doesn't actually motivate her to actually get on with the job."

"It is also good socially and they enjoy it."

Although much of Amanda's evidence for the benefits of chair-based exercise is anecdotal others have completed studies which show the tangible improvements it can bring.

According to a paper published by Later Life Training, which aims to provide specialist, safe and effective exercise training for people working with vulnerable older populations: "Chair-based exercises have been shown to have a beneficial effect at



STRETCH: From top, Amanda Mallett takes her class of chair based exercises at Friston Village Hall, from left, Roberta Simpson, Vivienne Adams and Mary Wright taking part, Barbara Ballis is helped by in Amanda

TURN TO PAGE 6

Alcohol problems targeted

PATIENTS facing difficulties with alcohol can now get more specialist help and support at West Suffolk Hospital after two new posts were created.

Mario Iannone has been appointed as alcohol liaison support worker, and will be based in accident and emergency for the next year after the post was funded by West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership through the Respect Alcohol, Respect Yourself (RARY) group.

As part of his role, he will train A&E staff to use an alcohol screening tool which will help them to identify people at particular risk. These patients will then be directed to the appropriate external agencies for extra support.

Data collected as part of this work will be passed onto the LSP's RARY group to help them to highlight trends and direct resources in the future.

John Griffiths, chair of the West Suffolk LSP, said: "The LSP is committed to working in partnership to make life better for people who live in Suffolk and this includes keeping people healthy and safe. This project is the first step towards the early identification of people with alcohol issues, and aligning individuals to services at this point will improve access to help and support for those who may benefit."

The second post, an alcohol liver disease nurse, comes following a successful bid for funding from the Government's East of England Regional Office.

Louise Bland, a dual-trained general and mental health nurse, already has a specialist knowledge regarding this patient group and has been appointed to the year-long post. She will be responsible for developing an improved pathway of care for alcohol disease patients.

Look younger, live longer

Fresh-faced people are likely to live longer than those who look old before their time, according to researchers who found that looking younger was associated with increased survival as well as better physical and mental functioning.

The study, led by a team from the University of Southern Denmark, attributes the link to key pieces of DNA called telomeres, which indicate the ability of cells to replicate and are also related to how young a person looks. A telomere of shorter length is thought to signify faster ageing and has been linked to a number of diseases, such as cancer.

Cannabis spray 'reduced pain'

Cancer patients who used a cannabis mouth-spray had their pain levels reduced by 30%, a study has found.

The cannabis-based spray, like a mouth freshener, was used on 177 patients by researchers from Edinburgh University. They found that it reduced pain levels by 30% in a group of cancer patients, all in the Edinburgh area, who had not been helped by morphine or other medicines.

The spray was developed so that it did not affect the mental state of patients in the way that using cannabis would.

The researchers said their findings, reported in the *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, did not justify smoking cannabis as this could increase the risk of cancer.

They said the spray works by activating molecules in the body called cannabinoid receptors which can stop nerve signals being sent to the brain from the site of pain. Edinburgh University's Professor Marie Fallon said: "These early results demonstrate that cannabis-based medicines may deliver effective treatment for people with severe pain but it is important to understand the difference between their medical and recreational use."



COMMUNITY BASED: Above, Amanda shows her class some more exercises, below, Mary Wright taking part

FROM PAGE 7

maintaining or promoting independence and mobility in older people."

The range of improvements demonstrated in research trials lasting eight weeks or longer looking at chair-based seated and chair-assisted standing exercises in a variety of settings include improved strength, power, flexibility and balance along with a better ability to perform everyday tasks.

Crucially depression, body fat, arthritic pain and the risk of falls was shown to decrease – and this is a big deal for the quality of lives of so many frail older people not to mention the hard-pressed NHS.

The paper adds: "Chair-based exercise has specific benefits as a training method – it stabilises the lower spine by providing a fixed base; it allows greater range of

movement by providing points of leverage and support; it minimises load-bearing and reduces balance problems in those with particularly poor mobility and arthritic pain; it increases confidence in those unable to perform free-standing exercise.

"Even one session of chair-based exercises can improve memory recall during the session and for up to half an hour after in nursing home residents. Chair-based exercise is invaluable in the rehabilitation of the older person with

osteoarthritis because it allows range of motion work without weight-bearing.

"Finally, seated exercises have been shown to increase habitual physical activity in patients with heart failure and may be a feasible exercise programme for women with advanced cancer for controlling fatigue and improving physical well-being."

Dr Dawn Skelton a reader in ageing and health at Glasgow Caledonian University who works with Later Life Training, says decreasing strength, balance and coordination appear to be key risk factors for older people in falling, as illustrated by way common fracture sites change with age.

In the 40-65 age group wrist fractures become more common and fractures of the hip become more prevalent after the age of 80 due to reduced reaction times.

"(With chair-based exercise) in addition to the potential for physical gains in strength and function comes a whole host of other benefits and positive 'spin-offs' to body and mind," she says.

"This is of particular relevance to

our ageing populations where reduced mobility and resulting decreases in confidence bring with it reduced opportunities to socialise leading to isolation."

Amanda says the classes she runs are great fun and very rewarding. "I have one lady in one of the residential homes who is 100 and a lady of 96 in one of my community classes.

"I think the most important thing I see with older people whatever their age is that it is just good to keep moving. If you do nothing your health will deteriorate – it

doesn't matter if you are 18 or 80, the same applies."

■ Amanda Mallett runs community chair-based exercise classes at the Fairfield Centre, Aldeburgh, Mills Meadow, Framlingham, Priston Village Hall and Suffolk Place Woodbridge.

■ For more information visit Amanda's website at, the Suffolk Coastal website at (follow the 'helping you' link to the Suffolk Coastal Good Health Guide). Amanda can be contacted on 01728 688696 or by email at .

case study

Janice's story

Janice Croucher has just turned 60. Ten years ago she was diagnosed with a brain tumour which was successfully operated on. Two years later she found herself back in hospital with a second brain tumour – this time during the operation she also suffered a massive stroke. It has been an uphill struggle for Janice to get back to any sort of normal life. The operations have left her with no balance system, so standing for any length of time is impossible. She has put on five stone since the operation because of the steroid treatment and by her own admission she could very easily have sunk into a deep depression. But Janice is a battler and she was determined to get fit and lose weight.

When she was told about a local chair-based exercise class she immediately rang and booked herself in. It has changed her life. Now she can exercise sitting down and has become fit enough to take up swimming again at the local pool. She loves the social aspect of the group too and has made loads of new friends. Research shows that chair based exercise produces significant improvements in both physical and mental health. It also increases confidence in those unable to do free standing exercise. It is also well accepted that once older people become immobile they often become housebound, depressed and lonely. These simple exercises have shown Janice that there is life outside her four walls.

