



# Physical activity interventions for older adults

## Increasing physical activity

- When designing and implementing interventions, it is recommended that agencies work with both the providers and older adults to offer tailored programmes which reflect the preferences of older adults.
- Common features found in successful physical activity interventions include:
  - educational components where participants are given tailored information and counselling by health professionals on physical activity
  - continuous reviews of participant's progress towards goals throughout the interventions
  - matching the intervention to individual's readiness to become physically active
  - employing strategies and techniques to promote and sustain physical activity such as self-monitoring and goal setting
  - identifying fears and barriers and working with the older adult to provide solutions to overcoming these
  - provision of on-going support and encouragement throughout the intervention such as home visits and peer support.

- Participation in group-based physical activity appears to be effective at increasing physical activity levels in the short term.
- For long term adherence to physical activity, home-based programmes provide the best results.

## Falls specific

- To reduce falls, activities must be specifically designed with the purpose of improving balance rather than simply increasing physical activity levels.
- Exercises most effective in reducing incidence of falls are those:
  - aimed at improving postural stability through strength, balance, flexibility and co-ordination
  - including aspects of bone strengthening and walking style development, which support endurance work
  - with tasks to challenge the balance and visual systems
  - which are progressive and tailored specifically to the individuals
  - delivered by a trained specialist in either a home or group-based setting.

# Implications for practice when working with older adults

Strategies to increase physical activity in older adults should be implemented alongside those aimed at increasing general health. The Chief Medical Officers' Guidelines should always be used to underpin programme designs. It is recommended older adults are invited to engage in all aspects of policy and programme development and implementation. Furthermore, robust monitoring and evaluation should be built into all local programmes. Potential actions for those working with or around older adults are listed below.

## Commissioners

- Ensure there is a solid evidence base for impact and cost effectiveness when commissioning and designing programmes.
- Commission multi-level interventions that include population wide, community-based and one-to-one components.
- Make sure programmes are targeted to specific needs and abilities of older adults.
- Commission programmes that support sustained participation beyond 12 months.

## Policy makers

- Assess in advance the intended and unintended impact policy proposals might have on older adults' physical activity participation.
- Work to promote social cohesion and environments which are safe and appropriately support physical activity in local communities.
- Provide educational opportunities focusing on physical activity promotion for professional groups who work with older adults, eg, carers in residential settings.
- Ensure equal opportunities for both men and women.

## Practitioners

- Review and improve knowledge and understanding of ageing and physical activity through appropriate education, training and resources.
- Develop a local coalition or alliance to ensure the co-ordination of community physical activity services and programmes.
- Ensure local physical activity programmes:
  - are tailored to the specific needs of older adults
  - offer access and appropriate choice to older adults
  - include equal opportunities in gender specific activities.
- Work with 'significant others', eg, instructors, care givers, family members, who are positioned to support older adults to become more physically active.
- Verify those providing opportunities for older adults are appropriately trained to deliver experiences that are enjoyable, effective and safe.



## References

For a complete list of references used in this fact sheet and for more detailed information please see the BHFNC evidence briefing on physical activity for older adults available from [www.bhfactive.org.uk/older-adults](http://www.bhfactive.org.uk/older-adults)

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