

## PROMOTING THE AGED FITNESS AND WELLNESS THROUGH ENGAGEMENT IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

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### Abstract

*The aged are usually less energetic and sometimes look fragile due to less nutrition and affect ageing of the entire body system. Nevertheless, they need to keep fit physically, mentally and socially to meet up with minimal challenges they still meet as members of the larger society. The authors believed the aged fitness and wellness can be promoted through their participation in physical activities. They advanced the essence of fitness and wellness for the aged persons and types of exercises they need to engage in.*

**Key words:** *Aged, Fitness, Physical activities, Exercise*

### Introduction

Ageing is a normal or natural process of human existence with different stages in structures of cells, tissues, organs and systems. People age differently and die due to several factors (Moronkola, 2018). Physical activity is always at a declining rate in the human population as one grows old, weak and fragile. Unlike human, other mammals increases their physical activity while ageing because their life depends on it for survival. The aged are prone to be inactive due to a lack of physical activity. Therefore, there is the need for physical exercise, people over the age of 50 years can experience a range of health problems.

Moronkola (2013) noted that adult health or health of the aged attracts less medical attention in Nigeria when compared with adolescent sexuality, maternal and child health. However, if the elderly or the aged are taken care of, they can still contribute meaningfully to the development of their communities. Regular physical activity is a key component in developing a healthy lifestyle as it is associated with better physical and cognitive functioning in older adults and also with improved life expectancy (Marcos, Figueiredo, Teixeira, Poveda, Constança, Santos-Silva & Elísio, 2017). Azubuike (2007) stated that adequate engagement in physical activity can prevent or delay the onset of high blood pressure and minimize blood pressure in a hypertensive patient as it has been found out that exercise when regular prevent or moderate consequences of debilitating diseases. Gill, Friedenreich, Sajobi, Longman, Drogos, Davenport, and Poulin (2015), reported that moderate to vigorous physical activity is associated with a reduced risk of chronic diseases, including Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, depression and metabolic syndrome. A regular physical activity regimen may have particularly beneficial effects in the later years, and may in fact slow the aging process. The anticipated increase in chronic conditions associated with

aging, as well as their accompanying strain on the healthcare system, presents a strong argument for promoting habitual physical activity as a primary strategy for fitness and wellness in the aged (Abby & Diane, 2021).

### **Essence of Fitness and Wellness in Aged Persons**

According to the World Health Organization (2002), in both developed and developing countries, the ageing of the population raises concerns about whether or not, a shrinking labour force will be able to support that part of the population who are commonly believed to be dependent on others (i.e., children and older people). Again, active ageing fitness and wellness programmes are required to enable people to continue to work according to their capacities and preferences as they grow older, and to prevent or delay disabilities and chronic diseases that are threatening to individuals, families and the health care system as a whole.

Fitness and wellness are critical for elderly and aged people as it prevents chronic health conditions and lessening the effects of other conditions. The healthy habits of a quality wellness programme for elderly and age can help lower the risk of diabetes, cancer, obesity, arthritis, Alzheimer's Disease, high blood pressure, and mood disorders like depression and anxiety (Premier Senior Living, 2022). Pereira, Vogelaere and Baptista (2008) opined that, engaging the aged population in sensible fitness and wellness programme minimizes their risk of contracting cardiovascular diseases. The exercise helps the aged people to reduce body fats which may have adverse effect such as development of obesity and heart related diseases. It is based on fact that when muscles are engaged in a strenuous exercise, an individual's metabolic rate also increases. This assists in burning up excess calories. In line with this, excess cholesterol is significantly reduced through vigorous exercise. This increases circulatory function of heart capillaries and other blood vessels. Besides, positively exercise affects the rate at which endocrine glands function.

Wellness programme which includes particular exercises, gives the aged people the opportunity to become independent and proactive in their health and well-being. This to help maintain and improve mobility, range of motion, balance, stability, and strength and endurance, leading to a more remarkable ability to function daily without help (Premier Senior Living, 2022). Alexander and Goldberg (2006) reported that independently of individual differences, fragilities or pathologies, light-to moderate-intensity exercise programmes has proven to be effective in the prevention of falls and their consequences. Tai-chi, step, strength, agility, stretching and multi-modal training or adherence to specific programmes of exercise directed to prevent falls have reduced fall events, fall injuries and also fear of falling. Maintenance or recovery of the elderly physical functionality through well designed fitness and wellness programmes (Jones & Rikli, 2000; Herala, Kivela, Honkanen, Koski, Laippala, & Luukinen, 2002; Westerterp & Meijer, 2001), apart from decreasing fall rate and its consequences,

it also contributes to improving the quality of life. These programmes become effective when performed on a daily basis, and has to be focused on functional capacities, such as coordination, agility, balance, mobility, muscular strength and flexibility (Bateni, Zecevic, McIlroy & Maki, 2004).

### **How Much Physical Activity is Enough for the Aged?**

Health benefits can be derived from becoming more physically active, but the greatest benefits come from engaging in planned and structured exercise (Blair & Connelley, 1996). Physical fitness will be improved and cardiovascular risk factors can be reduced with low to moderate of physical activity. However, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2022), recommended that adults aged 65 and older need at least 150 minutes a week (for example, 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week) of moderate intensity activity such as brisk walking, they need 75 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity activity such as hiking, jogging, or running. At least two days a week of activities that strengthen muscles. Activities to improve balance such as standing on one foot about 3 days a week.

### **Benefits of Exercise for Seniors and Aging Adults**

Regular physical activity and exercise for seniors helps prevent many common diseases, such as coronary related and other debilitating diseases . Exercise improves overall immune function, which is important for seniors as their immune systems are often compromised. Light exercise, such as walking, can be a powerful tool for preventing various kind of disease (The GreenFields Continuing Care Community, n.d). Stathi, Fox, Withall and French (2014), stated that adequate engagement in physical activity has an important preventive effect for the key physical diseases such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, and cancers of the colon and breast even into old age.

Physical activity programme for older adults have been shown to improve mobility, walking speed, strength, and also cognitive abilities important to everyday living. This broad set of benefits should be set alongside the health and safety risks of taking part in graded physical activity for older adults being small. In contrast the price of not being active can be very high.

Overtime, studies have indicated when older adults participate in physical exercise, it provides them with mental health benefits that are endless. Domonell and Burn (2016) reported that exercise produces endorphins (the “feel good” hormone), which act as a stress reliever and leaves one feeling happy and satisfied, thereby fine-tuning motor skills benefit and cognitive function. In addition, exercise has been linked to improving sleep, which is especially important for older adults who often suffer from insomnia and disrupted sleep patterns. Wallace (2001) explained that exercise increases alertness and agility in the brain. This implies that exercise is vital in the sense that it boosts functional nature of the memory. Exercise increases blood flow through capillaries right

inside the brains. This accelerates supply of oxygen and glucose that enhances neuron function need to retain memory and relaying of information.

### **Promoting Physical Activity among Aged People**

Moronkola (2018) admonished the aged to learn to exercise alone or in group to develop physical fitness and promote psychological health. Engaging in exercises like walking, jogging, playing soccer, basketball etc prevent onset of high blood pressure, accumulation of cholesterol, injuries and strains to ligaments and bones. Exercise aids digestion, promote mental alertness and immune system. The ability to continue to walk to shops, offices, spending quality time with grandchildren and go on holiday make the difference between living and living well. Therefore, the role physical activity plays is absolutely critical. It is a fact that not only does physical activity add years to life but it adds life to years (Stathi, Fox, Withall & French, 2014). Physical activity is a safe way to improve health and to promote healthy aging, while it is generally accepted that physical activity is a healthy behavior and that any activity is better than none. Evidence supports population-wide, community/locality-based and One-to-one interventions for the promotion of physical activity to improve health among older adults (Chavez, Scales&Kling, 2021).

Population-wide interventions is one way of promoting physical activity among the aged people, through environmental and policy interventions, campaigning and promotion. It requires the involvement of the various groups or sectors such as the public health, parks and recreation, education, research, fitness industry, sports and local government to support for incidental activity indoors, personal transport (walkway and cycle lane) provide facilities and educate the them on the health benefits for engaging in physical activity. Stathi, Fox, Withall, and French (2014) reported that it will take many initiatives; convincing the older population that physical activity is critical to ageing well, providing the kinds of support, services, and facilities that they could benefit from and improving neighborhoods so they are truly 'user friendly' and appealing for activity. The range of options from provision of allotments, improving green spaces and public transport, to opening up fitness and health centres in the quiet morning hours are diverse and need partnership working.

Community/locality-based interventions physical activity programme for older people may take many forms, ranging from the introduction of a city-wide walking programme, to the establishing of a village-based peer health mentor or leadership programme. Most commonly, targeting new participants, though not always, time limited and also draws upon the skills of a number of local partner organisations. From design to completion, there are a number of key components or design characteristics essential to success (British Heart Foundation, n.d).

One-to-one interventions is a one-to-one counselling/advice or group counselling/advice; self-directed or prescribed physical activity. This advice can

come inform of a planned and structured counselling and lifestyle advice programmes, referrals and recommendations provided within a health or care setting and informal visiting, mentoring and befriending schemes (Hillsdon, Foster & Thorogood, 2005; British Heart Foundation, n.d).

### **Types of Exercise for Older Adults**

National Institute on Aging (2021) recommended that older adults participate in these four main types of exercise:

#### *1. Endurance exercises for older adults*

Endurance activities, often referred to as aerobic, to help increase breathing and improve the heart, lungs, and circulatory system. They also can delay or prevent many diseases that are common in older adults such as diabetes, colon and breast cancers, heart disease, and others. Examples of endurance exercise are brisk walking or jogging, yard work (mowing, raking), dancing, swimming, biking, playing tennis or basketball etc.

#### *2. Strength exercises for older adults*

Strength activities make muscles strong and one stay independent and make everyday activities feel easier, like getting up from a chair, climbing stairs, and carrying groceries. Keeping the muscles strong can help improve balance and prevent falls and fall-related injuries. Examples of strength exercises are lifting weights, carrying groceries, arm curls, wall push-ups etc.

#### *3. Balance exercises for older adults*

Balance exercises help prevent falls, which is a common problem in older adults that can have serious consequences. Many lower-body strength exercises also will improve balance. Examples of balance exercises include: Tai Chi, a "moving meditation" that involves shifting the body slowly, gently, and precisely, while breathing deeply. Standing on one foot. The heel-to-toe walk. The balance walk. Standing from a seated position.

#### *4. Flexibility exercises for older adults*

Flexibility exercises or stretching can improve flexibility in older adults. Moving more freely at the joint is a health indicator which tells how healthy one is. It will make it easier for one to reach down to tie their shoes. Examples of flexibility exercises are the back stretch exercise, the inner thigh stretch, the ankle stretch, the back of leg stretch etc.

### **Conclusion**

Physical activity is the remedy to ageing. It is also, an important measure to reducing the cases of mortality in the general population. In the aging population, physical activity has shown to delay the process of ageing, prevent disease, lower the risk of falls, improve mental health and well-being, and improve cognitive function. It is therefore pertinent for older adult to develop the habit of engaging

in a well-structured and planned physical activity program to develop strength, balance and endurance.

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