

Help sheet 10:

Motivators for physical activity

Different people have different motivations to undertake a change to their physical activity levels. Health, gender, culture, lifestyle and beliefs about the benefits or risks of physical activity will all influence participation in physical activity. Encouraging behaviour change is not easy. It is essential that the older person is well informed in discussions about options and preferences for physical activity. Some of the motivators for older people to become more physically active are:

- increased awareness of the health benefits of physical activity and prevention or management of illness
- improvement in independence (independent living), especially relevant for frail individuals wishing to maintain their current levels of independence or do an activity/hobby they are no longer able to do
- having achievable goals (for example, being able to play with their grandchildren, hanging the washing out, walking to the letter box or park)
- having fun and socialising
- having a purpose for the activity, such as walking to buy the newspaper, doing volunteer work
- avoiding the negative stereotyping of ageing
- having a positive environment in which to undertake the physical activity (pleasant parks, safe streets)
- a health professional's advice to be more physically active
- trying some form of physical activity and enjoying it
- hearing of positive examples of physical activity from their peers
- knowing it is safe and tailored to their needs
- having a good level of nutrition to facilitate them being physically active.

There are differences in what motivates men and women to be more physically active. Men report that health benefits influence their participation in physical activity while women are more motivated by the social interaction aspect (Dishman, 1994, as cited in Bauman, 2002).

'I don't like to exercise...however I do walk to a friend's house three times a week, 30 minutes each way, as she likes to do the crossword and has trouble seeing it. I like helping her.'

Supporting an individual's motivation to increase their physical activity levels

- Establish good communication, be positive and encouraging, and listen to what the older person has to say.
- Considering the person's interests is paramount; discuss their preferences with respect to physical activity.
- Respect the person's choice not to alter their levels of physical activity. For many individuals, altering their levels of physical activity is not something they have considered.
- Be a good role model.

- Have available a variety of options for physical activity (both formal and incidental). Refer to Help sheet 15 in this Resource Kit, 'Structured physical activity programs' and Help sheet 16 in this Resource Kit, 'Incidental and leisure activity'.
- Consider personal preferences as to mixed or same gender programs.
- Provide correct information on both the health and functional benefits of physical activity.
- Involve families and friends in encouraging and participating in physical activity.
- Involve the older person's general practitioner (GP) or another health professional if you, the person or carer, has concerns about the person changing their levels of physical activity. Suggest that the person speaks to their GP about 'Lifescrpts' an Australian Department of Health and Ageing program developed by a consortium including the NSW Heart Foundation, SouthCity GP services, Centre for GP Integration Studies (University of NSW), The University of Newcastle School of Health Sciences (Nutrition and Dietetics) Flinders University Department of General Practice with Kinect Australia. The program's aim is to assist GPs to give personalised advice and support to their patients about quitting smoking, eating healthier food, drinking alcohol safely, exercising more and achieving and maintaining a more healthy weight. For more information on 'Lifescrpts' contact General Practice Division Victoria <http://www.gpdv.com.au/> (03) 9341 5200 or Australian Division of General Practice www.adgp.com.au or Kinect Australia on 8320 0100 or go to www.kinectaustralia.com.au
- Consider the other responsibilities of the older person (for example, consider home exercise programs or physical activity programs associated with existing carer networks for somebody who is very busy with caring for a spouse/friend/relative).

Considerations for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities

- Consider socio-culturally appropriate activities or bilingual physical activity programs for older people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds (there are lower rates of physical activity among people of CALD backgrounds).
- Provide information on both the health and functional benefits of physical activity to the older person and their carer in their preferred language.
- If starting a CALD physical activity program, consider employing multicultural staff (that is, staff from the same CALD backgrounds as the participants) to run the program or to assist with the program.
- Consider promoting physical activity in both English and other languages and through culturally specific media (such as CALD radio stations and newspapers).

Above all, think how you would feel in the older person's place and how you would like to be approached when discussing physical activity.

Maintaining and increasing physical activity levels

If you are in contact with an older person who has made a change to their physical activity levels it is also important to be aware of the importance and difficulty of maintaining the change. There is a stronger likelihood of maintaining an increase in physical activity levels with the following (not all of these will be relevant for everybody):

- incorporating into a community group based program some exercises the older person can do at home
- doing it with a friend
- ongoing supervision of any exercises
- moderate intensity exercise rather than low intensity
- ongoing rewards and encouragement from health professionals, family and friends
- ongoing telephone support and follow up after an exercise program has finished
- intermittent review of outcomes of the physical activity by the GP or physiotherapist.

'Sometimes I think I would rather stay in bed in the morning but I know Joan will be waiting for me at the corner...to go for our morning walk. I can't leave her standing there so I get up and go. Of course once I am up and about I can't believe I wanted to stay in bed, Joan and I talk and laugh the whole way.'

For more information

A useful resource is a video, titled *Active living: Getting better with age* (Department of Human Services and Sport and Recreation Victoria, 1999), which explains the benefits of physical activity and how older people can safely and gradually participate in physical activity. It is available at some Video Ezy stores and libraries for free.

The 'Go for your life' website contains information and practical tips on ways to be more active and improve nutrition. 'Go for your life' is a component of the Victorian Government's Healthy and Active Victoria Strategy that aims to improve the overall health and wellbeing of all Victorians by increasing levels of physical activity, improving eating habits, getting people involved with their community and acting as volunteers. <http://www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au> or 1300 73 98 99

References

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Bauman, A, Bellew, B, Vita, P, Brown, W & Owen, N (2002) *Getting Australia active: towards better practice for the promotion of physical activity*. Melbourne, Australia: National Public Health Partnership.

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Dishman, RK (1994) *Advances in exercise adherence*. Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics.

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