

## Help sheet no.18

### Motivators for physical activity

Staff have an important role in encouraging and enabling residents to participate in physical activity.

Studies by Ruuskanen & Parkatti (1994) and Lemke & Moos (1989) identified a number of factors that appear to increase residents' likelihood of participating in activity. Some of these factors include:

- contentment with life in the nursing home/aged care facility
- absence of depressive symptoms
- higher level of function (particularly for males)
- higher education status.

Other factors that increase levels of resident activity relate to the organisation of the facility, not individual characteristics. Some of these include:

- greater staff resources
- more structured programs in terms of scheduling and staff control of decision making.

### Tips for motivating residents to participate in activities

- Choose the time when you know a resident will be most responsive.
- Be very positive and encouraging.
- Respect the residents' choice.
- Establish good communication.
- Be aware of body language; yours and the resident's.
- If you have a refusal, say something positive, for example, 'I hope you will go next time'.
- Talk about activities and special events that are coming up as you help the residents during the day.
- Talk to the residents about the activity after they have attended.
- Remember to involve families and friends in encouraging and participating in physical activity.
- Provide a variety of options for physical activity (both formal and incidental). Refer to **help sheet 20** and **help sheet 21**.
- Think about the individual resident's likes and dislikes...be genuine and realistic about what activities they might join.
- Use phrases such as:
  - 'Don't forget .....is on today'
  - '.....is on today, I/we would love to see you there'
  - 'I/we are hoping to see you at .....

'The (special event) is on today and it sounds like an event you would enjoy.'

'It is a lovely day and a walk in the sunshine and to look over the gardens would be enjoyable.'

- Don't ask closed questions that have a yes/no answer, such as: 'Do you want to go to .....
- Don't rush a resident or persuade them to do an activity they do not like doing.
- If there is a physical problem that may limit participation, use a phrase such as: 'if you are tired you can be brought home by wheelchair'.

Another method of motivating residents is having an activity run by an outsider to the facility. This may provide residents with the feeling that the activity is a 'special event'.

Residential care staff should offer and encourage participation in physical activities, but allow residents to choose their involvement. Getting to know individual resident's motivational factors is the key.

[Above all, think how you would feel in the resident's place and how you would like to be approached.](#)

Some residential care staff report that using the word 'exercise' to describe programs can be off-putting for residents. Terms such as 'movement', 'stretching', 'dance', 'activities', or 'games' to describe organised programs can motivate some who may not normally be interested in exercise classes.

### Useful resources

Gorin, S. (1998), Models of health promotion. In S. Gorin & J. Arnold (Eds.), *Health promotion handbook* (pp. 15–38). St Louis: Mosby.

Lemke, S, & Moos, R. (1989). Personal and environmental determinants of activity involvement among elderly residents of congregate facilities. *Journal of Gerontology*, 44, S139–48.

Ruuskanen, J., & Parkatti, T. (1994). Physical activity and related factors among nursing home residents. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, 42, 987–91.

### Videos

A useful resource for residents is a video titled *Active living: getting better with age* (1999) by the Department of Human Services and Sport and Recreation Victoria. It explains the benefits of exercise and how older people can safely and gradually participate in physical activity.

For residents who are less active, a series of three videos developed by the Arthritis Foundation may also help to promote physical activity.

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