

## Help sheet no.16

### What constitutes physical activity?

Physical activity is any activity that a person participates in and requires physical exertion.

The degree to which a physical activity contributes towards health benefits depends on the individual's health. Each person has a baseline level of physical activity which their body is capable of without causing undue stress.

Using the broad definition above, even simple activities such as standing up from a chair or walking 10 metres with assistance to the toilet may be considered physical activity for a very frail older person. However, for more active older people, such as many living in retirement villages, considerably greater amounts of energy expenditure will be required to achieve health benefits.

### Examples of physical activities

There are many activities that can enhance physical activity for older people. All of these activities can be modified to be appropriate for residents with higher or lower levels of ability and function.

#### 1. For chair bound older people

- Encourage maximum participation in showering, dressing, eating and general activities of daily living.
- Chair bound exercises and activities, for example, gardening and carpet or lawn bowls.

#### 2. For frail older people

- Walking as much as possible as part of the everyday routine.
- Trying to walk a little further or a little more often.
- Showering and dressing as independently as possible.
- Walking to the dining room for meals.
- Practising sit to stand transfers.
- Formal exercise classes or an individual exercise program (may be performed in sitting position), perhaps to music.
- Activities involving standing up, such as potting plants at a table, setting the table for meals, cooking, or washing dishes. A chair should be available for rest breaks if necessary.

#### 3. For older people with intermediate health problems affecting participation in physical activity

- Gardening at a raised flower box or bed or other activities that involve moderate periods of standing.
- Supervised hydrotherapy program.
- Group outings.
- Formal exercise classes or an individual exercise program (may be performed standing or sitting).

- Competitive games such as quoits, darts or bowls (may need to be modified if bending is a difficulty).

#### 4. For active older people

- Bowls/bocce/golf/swimming/tai chi/exercise classes.
- Line dancing/ballroom dancing/other forms of dancing.
- Brisk walking outdoors/walking to local shops instead of using the car.
- Using stairs instead of escalators or elevators.
- Gardening/mowing lawns.
- Shopping.

### **What does not constitute physical activity**

- Passive movements – movements where all effort is expended by another person, for example, a nurse stretching a contracted leg. If the older person is encouraged to assist with straightening the leg, this then becomes a physical activity (assisted active movement).
- Full assist transfers – where one or two nurses take full control of a transfer from one surface to another, without involving the older person at all. However, in instances where the older person is encouraged to participate as much as possible in the transfer, it then becomes a physical activity (assisted active transfer).
- Transfers using lifting machines – these do not involve any active participation of the older person, unless weight bearing is part of the transfer process (standing lifting machine).

### **Encouraging physical activity**

Encourage resident independence in all activities, even if it takes a little longer. This will help maintain or improve functional status, as well as improving self-esteem and confidence.

Take time to discuss with residents their previous hobbies and activities, as well as their current interests in terms of physical activity.