

## Help sheet no.17

### Physical activity and older people

#### Key messages

- Older adults, both male and female, can benefit from regular physical activity.
- Physical activity need not be strenuous to achieve benefits.
- Older adults can obtain significant health benefits with a moderate amount of physical activity, preferably daily.
- Older adults should consult a doctor before beginning a new physical activity program.
- In addition to cardio respiratory endurance (aerobic) activity, older adults can benefit from activities that strengthen muscle and enhance balance and flexibility. Improvement in any of these will help reduce the risk of falling and increase the ability to perform the routine tasks of daily life.
- Encouraging participation in personal activities of daily living (such as showering and meal assistance) can improve independence.

#### Facts

- The loss of strength and stamina attributed to ageing is, in part, caused by reduced physical activity.
- Inactivity increases with age.
- Among adults aged 65 years and older, walking and gardening are by far the most popular physical activities.
- Increasing physical activity can result in improved psychological status (reduced depression and improved morale) and greater levels of social interaction.

#### Benefits of physical activity

- Helps maintain the ability to live independently and reduces the risk of falling and fracturing bones.
- Helps maintain social contacts.
- Reduces the risk of dying from coronary heart disease and of developing high blood pressure, colon cancer and diabetes.
- Can help reduce blood pressure in some people.
- Helps people with chronic, disabling conditions improve their stamina and muscle strength.
- Reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression and fosters improvements in mood and feelings of wellbeing.
- Helps maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints.
- Helps control joint swelling and pain associated with arthritis (some activities may also aggravate arthritis, therefore people with arthritis should consult their doctor/physiotherapist before commencing a new program).

- Helps to maintain or improve functional abilities.
- Can improve bowel motility and reduce problems of constipation.

### For more information

Contact your nearest physiotherapist or occupational therapist:

- **Australian Physiotherapy Association (Vic Branch)**

6/651 Victoria Street

Abbotsford 3067

Ph: (03) 9429 1799

Fax: (03) 9429 1844

[www.physiotherapy.asn.au](http://www.physiotherapy.asn.au)

- **OT Australia - Vic Branch**

PO Box 1286

Nth Fitzroy 3068

Ph: (03) 9481 6866

Fax: (03) 9481 6844

[www.ausot.com.au](http://www.ausot.com.au)

### Reference

US Department of Health and Human Services, *Physical activity and health: a report of the Surgeon General*, Atlanta, Ga., 1996.