



EXERCISE FOR HEALTH

Introduction

Physical activity is a crucial complement to healthy eating. Any discussion of dietary changes to address or prevent weight gain and disease should include recommendations for making physical activity a part of daily routines. Encourage older adults to find exercises and activities that work for their bodies, and to discuss any planned changes with their doctors. This material can be covered both as an independent lesson as a part of other lessons.

Preparation

1. Review the topic.

- Start with the key concepts and discussion guide. The discussion guide provides suggested questions to draw out participants' existing knowledge as well as information you can offer in response to each question.
- Consider your participant demographics and potential interests, and conduct any additional research that may be necessary to prepare for specific questions or improve your own understanding of key concepts (see “Program Guide” for suggested resources).
- Research local exercise facilities (including parks, areas with stairs to climb, walking trails, etc.) and classes available for older adults. Talk to some participants or their peers ahead of time to get a sense of what sort of physical activities are realistic options for most participants. Consider providing maps of walking or bike trails. Older adults are most likely to increase their level of physical activity if given recommendations that are specific and locally feasible.

2. Plan your lesson structure.

- Prepare a rough timeline of your lesson and a plan to integrate discussion with the activity. Depending on available time and participants' interests, you can integrate discussion topics into an activity or use discussion time to open or close the lesson.

3. Plan how to administer pre-test (as well as post-test if this is the final session). See “Program Guide” for details.

- Print copies of test(s) for every participant.

These activities can be included in lessons on other topics, or can form the structure for an exercise-specific lesson.

- Walk around the block or through the building at the beginning of the lesson.
- Do group stretches (standing or sitting) at the beginning and end of the lesson. See suggestions on the next page for sitting stretches and movements.
- Ask participants to share favorite stretches with the group, or have different people share stretches during each lesson.
- Ask a yoga or tai chi instructor to visit the class and guide the group through some new exercises.
- Ask the group to pick an activity they would like to do together outside of class—form a walking/dance/tai chi club, plan a regular time to walk to the store together, or pick an exercise class to attend as a group.
- Walk to a store, farmers market or garden as part of a discussion about healthy eating habits.



Discussion Guide

Begin by asking participants to share their experiences with exercise. Why is exercise important? Does anyone have personal exercise goals? How much exercise is recommended for older adults? What are some different types of exercise?

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, older adults without limiting health conditions should perform moderate aerobic exercise for about 20 minutes every day and muscle strengthening activities 2+ days a week.
- Aerobic activity that makes you breathe harder and gets your heart beating faster can help prevent diabetes, colon and breast cancers, heart disease, and other chronic diseases. Examples of endurance activity include walking, jogging, playing tennis, biking, yard work and dancing.
- Keeping our muscles strong helps us continue to do daily tasks and helps prevent falls and injuries. Exercises to increase balance and flexibility are also important.
- Weight-bearing activities (anything other than swimming or cycling) are also important for maintaining bone health and preventing osteoporosis.
- In addition to being good for your health, physical activity can help you continue to do necessary tasks, like carrying a full laundry basket, raking leaves, climbing stairs, walking on uneven surfaces, tying your shoes and making the bed. Exercise can also help you keep doing the things you love, like pushing grandchildren on the swings, carrying them, or playing catch; walking or shopping with friends; cooking for friends and family; and gardening, traveling (even exploring your own community or taking a trip to another country) or other active hobbies.
- Exercise can also help prevent and treat depression and generally improve your mood.

Does anyone exercise, play a sport, or walk regularly? What about in the past? Have your exercise habits changed over time, and what has caused those changes? What are some barriers to getting more exercise?

- Exercising with others can make physical activity more fun and keep you motivated. Find a friend to walk, jog, bike or play sports with you, or sign up for an exercise class at a gym or community center. Remember that dancing is great exercise too—many communities have regular line or square dances you can join.
- Setting specific goals for both the short and long term can help you find an exercise plan and stick to it.
- Try to work physical activity into your daily schedule: make plans to go to an exercise class or walk with a friend, park the car farther away from the store or work, take the stairs instead of the elevator, lift weights while you watch TV, etc.
- Dance! Or play music while you do housework and see if you end up moving a bit more than usual.

Does anyone know any exercises or stretches you can do while sitting down?

- Movements and stretches you can do while sitting are great for keeping active while watching TV, reading or traveling.
- Stretch your arms and/or legs out in front of you. Point your toes or fingers forward, then rotate in alternating circles.
- Lift your heels so that just the balls of your feet are touching the floor, then set them down. Repeat several times.
- Release tension in your shoulders by rolling them forward ten times, then backward ten times.
- Hold your arms out from your body in a “T” shape, then lift toward the ceiling and bring them back down. Repeat.