

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR LTC RESIDENTS

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The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services developed national physical activity guidelines for all Americans (2018). These guidelines are inclusive of the older adult population as well. The benefits of regular physical activity are vastly known. For the older adult population, they include preventing and managing chronic disease, reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression, decreased risk of dementia, and preservation of physical function and mobility (USDHHS, 2018). Currently statistics show between 28-34% of older adults participate in some form of regular physical activity.

For older adults who reside in institutionalized settings such as long-term care, physical activity has a different look. Things like ambulating in the hallway or propelling a wheelchair down the hall are counted as physical activity. Researchers de Souto Baretto and colleagues (2016) offered updated recommendations for physical activity for individuals living in long-term care settings. These recommendations included:

- Every resident without contraindication should have a personalized exercise plan.
- The best type of exercise should be multicomponent including muscle strength and cardiorespiratory endurance exercises.
- Moderate-intensity exercises are feasible, effective, and safe.

They provided suggestions for how to create this type of exercise for older adults in long-term care that include exercises for strength and aerobic activity. They also provide recommendations for the frequency and duration of exercises.

Moderate exercise can be achieved by performing the following:

- Strength, 1 or 2 sets of exercises, performed at 13-15 repetitions maximum;
- Aerobic, exercises that noticeably increase heart and respiratory frequency, without generating breathlessness or undue fatigue (scoring 5 or 6 in a 10-point scale of perceived effort)

- High-intensity exercises can be executed but may require closer monitoring.
- Frequency. Twice a week, with an interval of at least 48 hours between sessions. Higher weekly frequency is safe and may be feasible for fitter residents.
- Duration: 35-45 minutes per session. Lesser durations may be needed during the first weeks of exercise. Longer sessions are feasible for most people.

As we move forward, strategies and interventions for keeping long-term residents physically active must be developed. Considerations include facility administrative support, environmental layout, staff involvement, and age appropriateness. Input and motivation from older adults are necessary to be aware of as strategies are designed so that efforts are not misguided. Mauer and colleagues (2018) found in their study that the attitude of the residents influence their need and therefore determines their behavior toward being physically active. One of the primary goals for physical activity within this group is the maintenance of function. Therefore, focused attention should be placed on developing and sustaining specific activities that will be both enjoyable, providing a mechanism for social interaction with other residents, and therapeutic.

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