

On Motivating the Older Adult Population to Increase Physical Activity

The older adult population is statistically one of the most sedentary populations. Motivating and engaging older adults to increase physical activity can be a challenge as they tend to drop out after 6 months (Hawley, Skelton, Campbell, & Todd, 2012).

Hawley et al. (2012) noted that the leadership of the exercise instructors and quality of instruction were important and influential. Leadership, commitment, quality, and level of involvement of instructors in exercise classes (not necessarily older adult classes) were key factors influencing participation and retention (Hawley et al., 2012). An instructor's experience is also key as it can double attendance (Hawley et al., 2012).

Hawley et al. (2012) found that instructors who expressed beliefs and confidence that older adults can successfully participate in an exercise program had better outcomes in their classes. The instructors' positivity towards older adults was important, and training/education of the instructor was a factor (Hawley et al., 2012). Health and fitness professionals' attitudes can influence older adults' attitudes towards exercise and activity (Hawley et al., 2012).

Connecting with older adults and reminding them of activities they may have enjoyed or identified with (e.g. ex-professional bowler) in their younger days may also help renew (and motivate) their interest in physical activity (Beggs, Kleparski, Elkins, & Hurd, 2014).

For older adult group exercises classes, design classes with similar age-group and/or similar gender (both preferable among older adults and such classes have better attendance rates) (Beauchamp, Carron, McCutcheon, & Harper, 2007; Dunlop & Beauchamp, 2013). The social factor (socialization, camaraderie) is as important as the physical benefits of exercise when motivating older adults (Beauchamp et al., 2007; Marcus & Forsyth, 2009).

References

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