

On Engaging Older Adults in Physical Activity

Definitely engaging older adults in exercise, and getting them to participate regularly and consistently is challenging. Older adults tend to drop out after 6 months (Hawley, Skelton, Campbell, & Todd, 2012).

While there are many factors that may influence participation, 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).

I think it is important to remember that "older adults" are just adults with more years. I don't think we should treat them as "frail" or "ready to break" or anything less than just folks who have a few years on us. Being educated about older adults' physiology would help belay some of the apprehension in possibly inadvertently doing harm or causing injury. However, I think education in common medical conditions is valuable in working with other special demographics such as pregnant women, diabetics, etc. I can admit to being nervous about working with those special groups, but shadowing a mentor or more experienced trainer would be very great in helping my confidence.

Reference

Hawley, H., Skelton, D. A., Campbell, M., & Todd, C. (2012). [Are the attitudes of exercise instructors who work with older adults influenced by training and personal characteristics?](#) *Journal Of Aging & Physical Activity*, 20(1), 47-63.