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Exercise and psychological benefits for older people

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Exercise and psychological benefits for older people

Abstract

The literature establishes that older people benefit not only physically, but cognitively and socially from being engaged in community recreational activities. Community recreational activities support healthy ageing (Young et al. 2015 p2), and allow older people to maintain cognitive abilities, improve self-belief, and quality of life indicators (Balducci et al. 2014).

Disciplines

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The attached colour photograph to accompany the story is used with permission from the participants in the photo. I personally took the photo and it comes from my collection.

A suggested caption: Exercise promotes psychological benefits

Exercise and psychological benefits for older people

The literature establishes that older people benefit not only physically, but cognitively and socially from being engaged in community recreational activities.

Community recreational activities “support healthy ageing” (Young et al. 2015, p.2), and allow older people to maintain cognitive abilities, improve self-belief, and quality of life indicators (Balducci et al. 2014).

The author’s research explored the meaning that older people with diabetes attribute to being involved in a community health promotion program. A qualitative phenomenological methodology was implemented to gather information.

Participants spoke of how being a part of the program made them feel good about themselves, how they felt more *‘positive’* during the program. This concept is discussed in literature as realistic optimism and enables older people to adapt and continue to experience good health (Song & Kong 2015). Participants verbalised that they felt, *‘so much better about myself’*. This then led to *‘coming along the next time’* as *‘doubt’* was left behind and *‘positivity’* replaced it. This was often attributed to personal effort and control: *‘doing something for my own wellbeing’*.

Older people with chronic diseases who are more physically active commonly express more positive thoughts than negative ones. This is particularly connected to their disease management and that they are more likely to be engaged in other aspects of their health, such as diet and nutrition. The participants spoke of the positive outcomes; the *‘pros’* of doing the program and how they *‘loved going’*. Such positivity resonated in all participants, many of whom expressed they were *‘sorry when it ended’* as they didn’t feel the same level of positive emotion and thoughts.

After cessation of the program, the psychological benefits were not present anymore to the same degree according to participants.

People with higher levels of physical activity report enhanced mental health (Law et al. 2014), greater quality of life (Apostolopoulos et al. 2014), and improved cognitive function (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, 2014). Participants in this research talked about feeling more '*clear minded*' and '*less stressed*' whilst undertaking the program. Exercise and health programs can help older people to engage in strategies that improve memory, that promote positive attitudes, and that assist in emotional awareness and care which can promote an increased quality of life (Fogarty, Farrell & Gutmanis 2014).

Since physical activity has been demonstrated to improve psychological resilience and thereby reduce and manage stress, as RNs/RMs delivering care, we have a responsibility to ensure it is included and encouraged in the older people we care for. We should be promoting and referring to health programs to sustain the psychological benefits of exercise in the older person. Results from this research, can lead to better understanding of how engagement, for older people, in health promotion and exercise programs can and should be enhanced.

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