

Transcript

MODULE 4: Experts presentation - the role of physical activity in healthy ageing

Can you tell our audience who you are and where you are from?

00:00:09

Dimitri: My name is Dimitri Vranken, and I'm a researcher at the Artvelde University of Applied Sciences, where I have a practical research project around adapted physical activities.

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Patricia: I am Patricia de De Vriendt. I'm an occupational therapist and I have a PhD in gerontology. And my focus is research in older adults. Frail, older adults.

What is active and healthy ageing?

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Patricia: Active and healthy ageing is an answer on the relative negative view we have on older adults. Active and healthy ageing is a policy framework from the World Health Organization. They want to focus on six important topics. They want to strive for better health for older adults, including health promotion and health prevention. They want to focus on security, environmental security, safety. They want to focus on behavioural topics like psychological, physical activity. And they strive for more autonomy, more independence, a better quality of life, and including lifelong learning. So the definition of active and healthy ageing is the process of optimising opportunities for health participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.

Are all older adults the same?

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Patricia: No, not all older adults are the same. In fact, we all get older. Even the moment you are born, you get older. So the process of getting older, of ageing, is a very personal and unique process. That's why if you are older, you are a very unique person. Indeed, the older adult doesn't exist. Everybody is very unique and personal with a past, a present and a future. But if you want to distinguish between groups of older adults, that's something we sometimes do for education or for intervention programs or for research. Then we can make a difference between the vital older adults, the ones who come with their bike to the fitness and go exercising in the fitness. But we also have another group of older adults because not everyone, all age is in a vital and active way. And then we come to the group of the frail older adults as frailty as one of the geriatric syndromes, the geriatric giants we call in medicine. And these people are very frail and vulnerable and are at risk for a lot of adverse outcomes, such as falls, hospital admission, co-morbidities, even mortality and disability. So this group has a lot of advantage of physical activity, and this is one of the priorities we should tackle in order to enhance active and healthy ageing.

What does physical activity for older adults look like?

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Dimitri: In general, it is important to be physically active in a variety of ways and at a variety of intensities. Usually, the more intense you do physical activity, the more the benefits you have on your health and on your functional capacity. Every day people should walk around, go to the grocery store by bike, or do some gardening work, because then your muscles and your heart rate increase. Additionally, especially for older

adults, it's important that they strengthen their muscles and do some functional balance exercises. This could be working out in the gym, doing some exercise at home, but also standing on one leg, walking on uneven ground or picking up things from the ground.

What are the key considerations for trainers who work with older adults?

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Dimitri: I think that three things are important when you're working with older adults. First of all, you should make activities meaningful for them. That means that you should ask their objectives and probably also try to provide social encounters during your physical activity. Second, I think the activity should be safe and also effective because, as pointed out, a lot of older adults are not the same. They have different medical backgrounds and difficult fitness level to begin with. So it should be aware of that when you're starting to train or start to exercise with older adults. And third, small activities step by step, day by day, are important to get the older adults going. But I think targeted goal oriented and specific exercises for strength, functional balance, aerobic endurance are important to incorporate in the daily and weekly schedule of the older adults.

Any final recommendations?

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Patricia: Like I said before, getting older is a very personal, very unique process. The older adult doesn't exist. We also know that physical activity is the best way of tackling frailty. But we also know that older adults don't want to be physical active because they experience a lot of barriers. So the way to get them physically active is by finding by trying to identify a motivator for them. And I'm sure pretty sure that finding a motivation, a goal, lying in meaningful activities, I think is the way to go. So try to find what's important for the older adults. Try to identify that and build your exercise program around that meaningful goal.

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Dimitri: I think it's important to be authentic in your relationship with the older adults. You have to have a certain level of expertise. You have to make your homework. You have to know the medical history. You have to make your preparations before activities with older adults. But also you are together in the pathway to physical activity. So you can question the older adult if you have questions about their lifestyle. If you have questions about their functional abilities, if you have questions about what motivates them. And I think if you really get to know the older adult, then you can really engage with them and take up your role as a physical activity trainer for older adults.

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Patricia: And in that way, the trainer is the best tool to motivate the older adult, I think.