

Evidence-based Strategies for Promoting Physical Activity among Older Adults: A Report from the US Department of Health and Human Services



A new report by the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) underscores a spectrum of evidence-based strategies aimed at encouraging older adults (65 years or older) to meet the recommended physical activity guidelines of 150 minutes of aerobic activity and two muscle-strengthening sessions per week. The HHS reiterates that physical activity can commence or be resumed at any age, debunking the notion that age is a limiting factor in adopting active lifestyles.

Older adults often encounter unique challenges in pursuing physical activity, including fear of falls and ongoing chronic conditions or pain that hinder mobility. Despite these challenges, the report emphasizes that physical activity can bestow specific benefits upon older adults, such as reducing fall risk and mitigating age-related muscle mass declines. This report extends the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, previously published in JAMA in 2018.

The proposed strategies to encourage physical activity among older adults are categorized into three distinct areas: behavior change (including physical activity counseling), physical activity programs (like exercise classes), and policy, systems, and environmental approaches (for example, the establishment of walkable and rollable communities).

In evaluation, the report offers valuable guidance on promoting physical activity among older adults, a critical demographic with unique needs and challenges. It strikes a balance between individual-focused strategies and larger policy initiatives, emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive approach. However, the successful implementation of these strategies hinges on effective coordination among clinicians, policymakers, and gerontologists. Further, the report prompts for additional research into effectively overcoming specific barriers to physical activity in older adults, like chronic pain and concerns about falling.

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