PROMOTING HEALTHY AGING IN MAINE THROUGH PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Department of Health and Human Services
Bureau of Elder and Adult Services
Bureau of Health

AARP Maine

Introduction

Getting Older Adults to Become Active

AARP has conducted research on the physical activity patterns of Americans age 50 and older, as well as message development and testing to increase activity among this age group.[1] These findings can be used to develop programs to address inactivity among older adults, thereby addressing part of the Healthy Aging goals in Maine.

- **Older adults are interested in exercise programs they can do at home.** Tip: Walking or exercise programs that can be done at home are attractive to older adults as are age specific programs held in community centers.

- **Some older adults are aware that exercise contributes to good health.** Tip: Provide information about what the activity recommendations for older adults are and how they can be achieved.

- **Older adults want to see images that remind them of themselves, not models or athletes**. Tip: Pictures of older adults, with not so perfect bodies, in sweatshirts, tee-shirts, and loose-fitting pants or "Maine-wear" are more likely to be attractive to the targeted audience.

Older adults want messages that validate what they are feeling rather than confront them or criticize them. Tip: Messages that confirm "it's not easy but every bit counts" are more likely to appeal to this population. Messages that confront them to "get off the couch" or "get moving," or use a critical tone, are less effective.

- **Physical activity may be more appealing than exercise**. Tip: Messages that use the term 'physical activity' may be interpreted as requiring less physically demanding effort and thus be more appealing to older adults.

- **Older adults want more information that is specific in directions and details for what they should do to achieve fitness goals.** Tip: Specific information on exercising safely, staying motivated, setting realistic goals, developing individualized plans, and tracking progress are likely to appeal to this population.

- **Older adults are motivated to exercise by recommendations from their doctors.** Tip: Enlist the help of the medical community to talk to their patients about increasing physical activity.

Barriers to Regular Physical Activity

Once physical activity programs are developed, barriers to participation remain for older adults. Medical reasons are most often given by older persons for not participating in regular physical activity – especially by those aged 65 and over. Non-medical reasons were also associated with a 20 – 30% reduction in physical activity by older persons. [2]

Non-medical barriers to physical activity in older adults may include a person's living arrangement, motivation, rural residence, environment, access, high school graduate or less and low-income.[2,3]

Maine's rural environment often is not conducive to promoting leisure time physical activity. In much of rural Maine people say they do not feel safe walking outside due to wild animals, hunting and road conditions in the winter. Even in Maine's more populated areas there is a lack of safe walking and/or biking routes, either due to no sidewalks, poorly maintained sidewalks, no shoulder on the road, etc.

Programs For Maine

Developing programs that work in Maine year round and will be appealing to older adults takes some creative thinking. Through educating communities and health professionals of the importance of physical activity and fitness opportunities in their area, they can encourage consumers to improve their physical fitness. Here are some ideas for physical activity programs for older adults.[6]

- Arrange for access to public buildings that provide a safe, indoor walking route, such as school gymnasiums and malls. Go to "PAN Action Packets" at www.maine.gov/dhs/boh/hmp/cardiovascularhealth.htm

- Video tape and periodically air on cable television, instructions for how to do exercises that incorporate strength training and flexibility using common household materials (chairs for supports, soup cans for weights, towels for stretching, etc.) and that can be done in the home

- *A Matter of Balance* program, designed to reduce the fear of falling and increase activity levels in older adults who have concerns about falls. www.bu.edu/roybal

- Educate communities and health professionals of the importance of physical activity and about fitness opportunities in their area so they can encourage consumers to seek opportunities to improve their physical fitness.

- Organize programs such as *The Lifetime Fitness Program.* An exercise program for seniors offering low-cost fitness classes. www.seniorservices.org/wellness/wellness.htm

- Organize *Growing Stronger: Strength Training for Older Adults* program. *Growing Stronger* is a strength-training program shown to increase muscle strength, maintain bone density, and improve balance, coordination, and mobility. // www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/growing_stronger/growing_stronger.pdf

1 *Synthesis of AARP Research in Physical Activity: 1999-2003.* AARP, Washington, DC: January, 2004

2 Satarino, W. A., Haight, T. J., Tager, I. B. (2000, May) Reasons Given by Older People for Limitation or Avoidance of Leisure Time Physical Activity." Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, 48(5) pp505-512

3 "National Health Interview Survey 2002". [On-line database] www.cdc.gov/nchs

4 United States Census Bureau. Census Bureau 2000 Summary file 3. [on-line database] www.census.gov

5 Maine Department of Health & Human Services. Healthy Maine 2010: Residence: Rural and Urban pp 57-60. [On-line chapter] www.maine.gov/dhs/boh/files/hm2010/appforall/b09res.pdf

6 National Blueprint: Increasing Physical Activity Among Adults Aged 50 and Older, BluePrint Mini-Grant programs. http://www.agingblueprint.org/MiniGrants

Other reference:
U.S.DHHS, CDC. (2004, February). Health Behaviors of Adults: United States, 1999-2001. Vital and Health Statistics, 10 (219).

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