

Promoting Active Lifestyles Among Older Adults

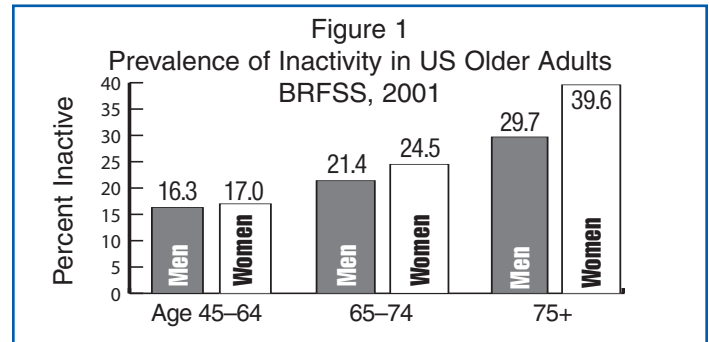
“No one is too old to enjoy the benefits of regular physical activity.” — U.S. Surgeon General, 1996¹

Successful aging is largely determined by individual lifestyle choices and not by genetic inheritance. Few factors contribute as much to successful aging as having a physically active lifestyle. Regular physical activity is important for the primary and secondary prevention of many chronic diseases (e.g., coronary heart disease, non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus, obesity), disabling conditions (e.g., osteoporosis, arthritis), and chronic disease risk factors (e.g., high blood pressure, high cholesterol).

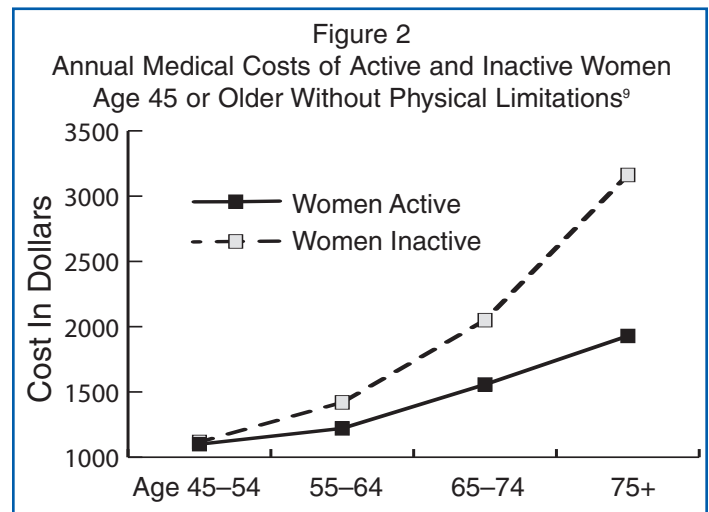
- Regular physical activity substantially delays the onset of functional limitations and loss of independence. It has been reported that inactive, nonsmoking women at age 65 have 12.7 years of active life expectancy, compared with 18.4 years for highly active, nonsmoking women.²
- The U.S. Prevention Task Force recommends counseling older adults on strategies to reduce falls; these include balance exercise³. One study reported a 58% reduction in falls among older women who began an exercise program.⁴
- The American Academy of Rheumatologists recommends physical activity in arthritis management. One study reported that regular walking reduced pain and improved function among people with arthritis in the knees.⁵
- Evidence suggests regular physical activity can improve the quality of sleep among older adults.⁶
- Physical activity often reduces symptoms of depression. One study found strength training as effective as medication in reducing depressive symptoms among older adults.⁷
- A recent study suggests that physical activity may help older adults reduce the amount of cognitive decline they experience as they age.⁸

Substantial health benefits occur with regular physical activity (e.g., 30 minutes of brisk walking, 5 or more days of the week). Additional health benefits can be gained through greater amounts of physical activity, but even small amounts of activity are healthier than a sedentary lifestyle.¹ Yet, few older adults achieve the minimum recommended 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on most, preferably all, days of the week.

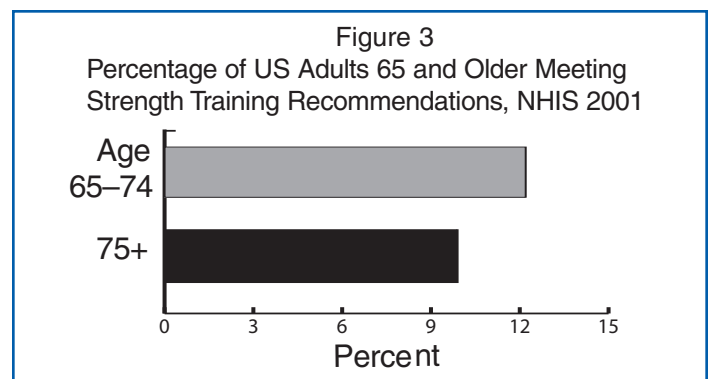
- CDC surveillance data show that about 16.7% of adults aged 45–64, 23.1% of adults aged 65–74, and 35.9% of adults aged 75 or older are inactive, meaning they engage in no leisure-time, household, or transportation physical activity. (Figure 1).



- Reduction in medical costs associated with physical activity increases with age, especially for women (Figure 2).⁹



- NHIS data show that only 11% of older adults meet strength training recommendations¹⁰. The vast majority of older adults are missing opportunities to improve their health through strength training. (Figure 3).



A Call to Action

Promoting physical activity among older adults is a national public health priority. A large preventable burden of morbidity, mortality, and health care costs currently exists, and the number of older adults is projected to increase from 13% in 2000 to 20% in the year 2030. These data, in part, led 50 organizations, including CDC, to create the National Blueprint: Increasing Physical Activity Among Adults Age 50 and Older. The Blueprint includes 60 specific recommendations for a collaborative approach to achieving the public health goal of a more physically active older population. Of the 60 recommendations, 18 have been identified as high priority. CDC is a lead or co-lead organization on three of the high priority areas. These areas are:

Blueprint Strategies Being Pursued by CDC

Public Policy:

Generate information on the cost effectiveness of increasing regular physical activity among the older adult population to help support public policy, program development, and reimbursement efforts.

Medical Systems:

Disseminate information on physical activity guidelines and best practices to the medical community.

Marketing:

Develop a national program that would provide incentives for communities to increase physical activity levels among the age 50+ population.

Additional Priorities Being Pursued by CDC

Economic incentives to promote walking. Support research to determine the extent to which walking behavior among adults age 50 years and older may be impacted by financial and other incentives.

“Growing Stronger: Strength Training for Older Adults.” Support the development and dissemination of a home based strength training program. For additional information please see: http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/growing_stronger/growing_stronger.pdf.

Health benefits of physical activity. Support evidence-based

review and development of guidelines for promoting physical activity among adults 50 years and older.

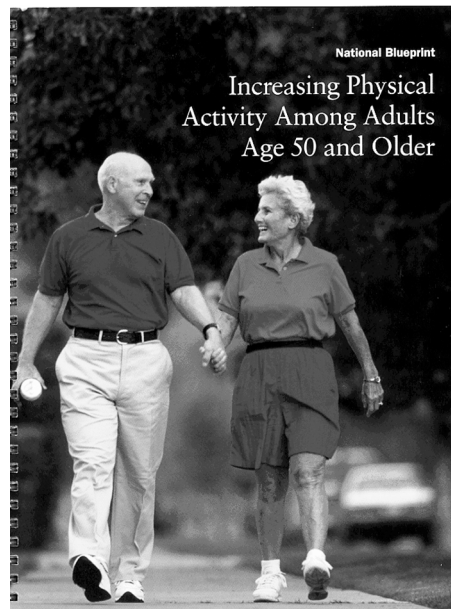


Photo courtesy of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

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For more information, please contact
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention
and Health Promotion, Mail Stop K-46,
4770 Buford Highway NE, Atlanta, GA 30341-3717
(770) 488-5820; Fax (770) 488-6000; ccdinfo@cdc.gov
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa