



## Beginning an Exercise Program: Fact Sheet for Providers

Exercise can be fun! Often individuals begin an exercise program, because they want to lose weight or improve their heart health. While these are important benefits, individuals should focus on participating in exercise programs they enjoy! Not only will this increase willingness to participate, but it's more likely they will keep participating independently. While going to the gym is one way to encourage individuals to exercise, it's not the only way! This fact sheet provides information about the benefits of exercise participation as well as strategies to support participants to use their community to achieve exercise goals.

### Ways to exercise in your community

Exercising doesn't require an expensive gym membership. Communities often have free activities to help citizens stay active.

- Look for free fitness classes: libraries, local parks and recreation facilities, and even churches often offer free fitness classes.
- Practice at home: the library will likely have exercise videos that you can check out. Or use your computer to look up different exercises. YouTube has a number of videos that will show you how to do exercises. There may also be free online classes.
- Local parks and recreation centers and/or YMCAs often have scholarships. Check with community centers or fitness facilities such as the YMCA or Planet Fitness for low cost or free programming.
- Look at meet-up groups online for people in the area that have similar exercise goals and interests as you (ie: running clubs, walking groups).

### Benefits of Exercise

Individuals with psychiatric disabilities can experience both mental and physical health benefits of participating in exercise. Research indicates that exercise can lead to reductions in depressive symptoms (Knubben, et al., 2007; Legrand & Heuze, 2007; Van Citters et al., 2010) and stress and anxiety (Van Campfort et al., 2011). Increases were found in sense of coherence (Forsberg et al., 2010) and positive well-being (Van Campfort et al., 2011). More obviously, exercise leads to increases in physical activity participation (Van Citters et al., 2010), weight loss (Tse et al., 2011), and improved cardiovascular health (Hutchinson, 2005).

### Planning an Individualized Exercise Program

Before starting an exercise program, it's important to understand current levels of physical activity, physical activity readiness, and activity interests. As with all physical activity programs, it is important that an individual get clearance from a physical health medical professional.

### Assessing Current Physical Activity

Activity logs, pedometers, and accelerometers are all strategies to assess one's current levels of physical activity. A physical activity log is simply a diary of activities the individual engages in throughout the course of a typical week. Prior to asking participants to complete the log, it is important to educate them on the different levels of physical activity (see below). Keeping an activity diary will help individuals be more aware of their current levels of activity participation and will help with monitoring activity progress in the future. Pedometers are simply monitors worn on one's belt that track steps throughout the day. Many insurance companies will give these away or they are also available at drugstores for less than \$5.00. Accelerometers are similar to pedometers, except that in addition to steps, they also track the intensity of one's activity.

Physical Activity Level	Definition	Examples
Sedentary	Activities that require little to no energy expenditure, and often occur when an individual is in a seated or reclined position (Pate, O'Neill, Lobelo, 2008; Owen, Sparling, Healy, Dunstan, Matthews, 2010).	Sleeping, Watching TV, Reading, Sitting & Writing, Sitting & listening to music, Using a computer
Light	Activities that require between 1.6 and 2.9 METs. Light activity may be purposeful (e.g., walking for pleasure) or incidental (e.g., walking for transportation). Light activity is related to total energy expenditure (Owen, et al., 2010).	Washing dishes, Shopping, Putting away groceries, Walking at a slow pace, Billiards, Darts
Moderate	Activities that require between 3.0 and 6.0 METs. Individuals engaged in moderate activity can often talk, but not sing during the activity.	Walking up/down stairs (normal pace), Walking moderate/brisk pace, Golf, Frisbee, Shooting basketballs, Table tennis, Vacuuming/Sweeping
Vigorous	Activities that expend the most amount of energy, anything above 6.0 METs. When an individual is engaging in vigorous activities, he or she will likely only be able to say a few words before pausing to take a breath	Jogging, Running, Playing basketball, Playing handball, Jumping rope, Sports that involve running

### Physical Activity Guidelines

Encourage participants to work towards the recommended levels of physical activity. Participation in physical activity at or above this recommended level is when individuals will start to see health benefits from participation. Weekly recommendations include both aerobic activity and muscle strengthening activities. Aerobic activity includes those activities that /increase your heart rate. This may include traditional exercise or even housekeeping activities such as vacuuming or sweeping. In order to have

activities count towards the total minutes, individuals should strive for participating in activities that last at least 10 minutes.

Weekly Recommendations of Physical Activity (DHHS, 2008)

2 hours & 30 minutes (150 minutes) of *Moderate* intensity activity

OR

1 hour & 15 minutes (75 minutes) of *Vigorous* intensity activity

OR

An equivalent mix of *Moderate* and *Vigorous* intensity activities

AND

A minimum of 2 days of muscle strengthening activities

Setting Goals & Monitoring Progress

Encourage participants to set both short term and long-term goals. If someone is currently engaging in no moderate-vigorous activity, two hours of light activity a week might be the place to start. Encourage participants to work towards the recommended levels of physical activity as an initial goal. Once that goal is consistently met, work with your participant to set more challenging goals. Integrate self-assessment into the goal setting/monitoring process.

Recommendation	Description
Set & Monitor Goals	Set individual goals for exercise. Goals should be staged to encourage success. Consider the number of times per week that can realistically be accomplished and the amount of time for each session. Develop strategies to monitor goals. Monitoring can be a source of motivation and encouragement.
Share Goals	Communicating goals with mental health providers, family members, and friends will help keep individuals accountable for their activities.
Identify Barriers	Everyone experiences unique barriers that may prevent participation. These may be financial, transportation, motivation, or even attitudes about exercise. Identifying these barriers is an important step to overcoming them.
Identify Facilitators	Beyond barriers, it's important to recognize the things and/or people that help ensure success. Facilitators may be in direct response to barriers or they may simply be an internal resource that helps navigating barriers easier.
Focus on interest	Many people view exercise as a chore or simply something that has to be done. By choosing an activity that is personally enjoyable, individuals are more likely to enjoy and sustain participation.
Don't get discouraged!	Beginning an exercise program can be difficult! Use every success as a motivation to stay engaged. When setbacks occur, re-evaluate barriers and facilitators and consider additional strategies to facilitate success.

## References

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