# Diagram Description automatically generated with medium confidence**For Seniors, By Seniors: Community Conversations**

Summary of discussion at ‘Community Conversation: Getting and Staying Physically Active’ on October 19, 2022

Watch the recording here: <https://youtu.be/dWGup1t4410>

Stay up to date with the series here: <https://parachute.ca/en/program/for-seniors-by-seniors-community-conversations/>

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| **Poll Results** | |
| **Poll 1**: Do you consider yourself active?  Yes 86%  No 12%  I Don’t Know 2% | **Poll 2**: Do you consider these activities as being active?  Yoga 55% Woodwork 24%  Gardening 67% Tai Chi 45%  Weights 48% Fishing 12%  Shopping 71% Pilates 31% |

# Why Older Adults Want to Stay Active

Participants understood the importance of remaining active as they age. Here are a few excellent reasons why people choose to remain physically active:

* Maintenance of physical health, including blood pressure, weight, and arthritis
* Maintenance of mental health as physical activity makes you feel good
* Reduced social isolation by meeting new people and connecting with others
* Continued independence to do what you want to do (grocery shopping, cleaning the house, looking after grandchildren, dancing with spouse/partner)
* Maintaining flexibility, strength, and balance as these are needed as they age
* Love being outdoors in nature, provides motivation for outdoor activities
* “Exercise gives me life”

# Activities Done to Keep Active

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| * Exercising while watching television (chair yoga, exercise bike, lifting weights, standing) * Breathing exercises to help maintain lung capacity * Walking, including walking the dog, walking around the mall, walking with a group * Join an online class using Zoom (like Zumba) * Watching exercise videos on YouTube (HASfit, BonES lab, Girl on the Pilates Mat, Yoga with Kassandra, YMCA @ Home, Essentrics, Improved Health - exercises by geriatric physiotherapist) * Line dancing or dancing with spouse/partner | * Joining an exercise class * Swimming, doing laps, Aquafit and Aquaform * Yoga, Tai Chi, Qigong, or seated versions of these * Walking on the edge of the curb helps to improve balance * Ebike and cycling * Gardening, pulling weeds and shoveling * Carrying in the groceries, bringing laundry up the stairs and other forms of housework * Bird watching * Cross country skiing * Playing with grandchildren * Walking to the nearest senior home for activities * Stretching and balance exercises before bed |

# Barriers Identified that Keep Older Adults from Engaging in Physical Activity

# Older adults identified that some of the challenges of keeping active came from the inability to access services and programs designed to help them keep active such as:

* Lack of in-person gyms or exercise facilities close by
* Online classes require technology skills
* Not enough spaces in formal classes
* Cost of classes, equipment and professional expertise on limited budget
* Transportation (access to transportation and cost of transportation)
* Weather (ice, snow, and heavy rain)
* Lack of access to professionals (physiotherapist, coach, occupational therapist, etc.)
* Lack of information on how to access programs

Participants also identified some of the barriers they face to keeping active on a daily basis. These included individual and psychological challenges, environmental factors, and physical abilities, such as:

* Finding motivation to exercise. Would be more motivated if they are able to access programs
* Limited space inside their home/apartment to exercise
* Finding the time for physical activity, also depends on what time of the day
* Medication may affect physical ability or decrease motivation
* Fear that outdoor activities or walking outside may cause falls
* Stigma around assistive devices and how they will be perceived by self or others
* Difficulty finding activities to achieve vigorous exercise. Finding exercises for mild and moderate exercise was much easier
* Harder to find groups of people to exercise with and gain access to gyms/facilities if living in a private home compared to those in an apartment or condo building
* Current abilities:
  + Limit what exercises they can do such as: being tired, balance, endurance
  + Unsure how to adjust activity for health conditions
  + Depression, may struggle to get out of bed some days
  + Difficulty in staying active every day, but found that every second day worked better for them
  + What is challenging for one person may not be challenging for another, so exercising with another person means you do not always get the same benefits
* Caregiving considerations:
  + Limited time having a caregiver to help with activities
  + Being unable to leave the house or person you are caregiving for

### Getting Active Again After an Injury or Illness

Some participants had difficulty getting active again after an injury or illness and mentioned their struggles but also how they managed to overcome those feelings, including:

* Feeling as if they cannot get back to the same level of activity as before
* Realizing that some activities they enjoyed are no longer possible
* Having less energy and feeling more tired than before
* Learning to accept changes, and learning to overcome and adapt to your new abilities
* Watching videos on Youtube with techniques on how to adapt exercises and physical activity to individual abilities

### Impacts of Covid-19

Since the Covid-19 pandemic began in 2020, gyms, fitness centres, and senior centres closed down to prevent the spread and infection. Unfortunately, the closures brought new barriers to formal activity, such as:

* Increased levels of social isolation with no in-person programming or activities occurring
* Decreased activity levels led to stiffness and tightness from arthritis
* Decreased endurance and energy levels with loss of vitality
* Fear of Covid-19 is still common as participants stated they were hesitant to participate in group activities again
* If participants stated they were ready to participate in group activities, they were faced with the difficulty of convincing their families to let them attend due to fears
* Some participants also stated they wanted to participate again, they just were unsure how to prepare themselves mentally
* Some participants did mention that during the pandemic that there was increased access to online programming and activities through YouTube and other websites with videos on physical activities to do at home

# Recommendations for Older Adults

* Slowly build up and work at your own individual pace and understand any movement is good movement
* Actively making choices by doing things the easy way or the way that may push you and get you exercising
* Adapt your exercise:
  + For your body and abilities, it may change day to day
  + For where you live and the weather
* Motivation and Goal Setting:
  + Finding motivation by knowing “why” you want to be active
  + Set small goals, and make new ones once you reach them
  + Use meditation to set goals and get you into the right mind space
  + Listen to lively music to get you energized
  + Make it part of your routine
  + If you think exercise is boring (no motivation, hard to stick with it), find ways to make it fun, adjust your perception and view on “boring”
* Gear/Equipment:
  + Invest in boots with metal cleats for winter
    - “makes me feel like I can walk again without falling”
  + Hiking poles and/or walkers to facilitate being active
    - “Could be the difference between a bad fall or a lovely walk”
    - Walkers help with balance, and also provide a place to sit if you get tired or need to rest
  + Resistance bands are a cost-effective way to do strength training. If you don't own weights, cans work as well
* Professionals:
  + Independent fitness studios and/or trainers can specialize in exercises for older adults
  + Remember what the exercise teacher taught you and practice them at home
* Exercises and Exercise Modification:
  + If you do not have to drive and are able to, try walking, biking or taking the bus as much as possible
  + Take the stairs whenever you can (good for exercise but also practice in case of emergency if you live in an apartment building)
  + If there are no safe walking trails near you, drive to one
  + Have weights beside you while watching tv, use them during breaks
  + If you have access to specialized fitness programs, use it (cancer program, cardiac programs, Alzheimer Society, etc.)
* Making activities social:
  + Start groups for walking or other activities
  + Get an exercise buddy
  + Even if you do not have a dog, go out to say hi to the dog walkers
  + Opt for activities with peers

# Recommendations to Organizations

* Accessible programs at a reasonable price/cost
* Participants want help with goal setting, more free online programs, and more outside exercise options
* A directory to find senior specific programming would be useful
* Programs led by qualified instructors to reduce injury
* Technological help accessing online exercise programs
* Assistance with the cost of classes, equipment, professionals and transportation
* Access to some form of communal space that can be used to exercise indoors during winter months
* More availability for physiotherapists, occupational therapists and trainers