

Certain Age Groups Need Exercise More than Others; Why Exercise is Important

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This paper will explore the reasons why exercise is needed by certain age groups compared to others, why many don't exercise, and the reasons everyone should exercise. Solutions to many of the problems some have with exercise will also be demonstrated. These solutions will include simple solutions as well as more extensive solutions such as the US government to adopt a physical exercise model like those of other countries. The exploration of the dangers of a sedentary lifestyle will also be explained.

Whether it's becoming slower, mentally or physically, the worsening of eyesight and hearing, and the deterioration of bone and muscle mass, it's a biological fact that every person ages. Scientific evidence has shown that physical activity is good for the elderly's physical health and mental capacity. The John Hopkins Medicine Institute (2023) in the article "Exercise and the Aging Person" lists the benefits saying, "Exercise also helps to do the following: Increase flexibility, tone muscles, build stronger bones, enhance cardiovascular fitness, and improve mobility and balance" (John Hopkins Medicine Institute, 2023). These benefits are very obviously the opposite of what many people know to be the effects of aging. In fact, the benefits help counter or lessen the effects that I mentioned at the top of this paragraph. Slowness is countered by cardiovascular fitness and mobility, and the deterioration of muscle and bone mass is countered by toning muscles and building stronger bones, just to name a few of examples of this.

With teens, however, it's important to note that in these early years are when puberty is reached and hormones are running rampant. This makes the benefits of physical activity different compared to a much older person. According to the Center for Disease Control (2019, p.1), the

most important benefits to note for teens is “preventing health conditions, reducing stress and negativity, boosting academic performance and even enhancing skin health and appearance” (Center for Disease Control, 2019, p.1). At this age, it is easy to argue that physical activity is very beneficial for a growing kid, this is why school sports are often promoted so much.

What these two age groups, the elderly and teens, have in common is they both fall just outside of a major statistic. According to Sandra Heath for Wellbeing Post (2022), the age group to “most likely exercise is people from ages 18 to 40” (Heath, 2019, p.3). This means that teens 17 and below and the elderly are much less likely to do physical activity. Looking first at teens, according to the Center for Disease Control “approximately 50% of young Americans aged 12 to 21 lack a regular, vigorous activity routine” (Center for Disease Control, 2019, p.1). That’s exactly half of teenagers in America that should be, but don’t, do regular physical activity. The American Heart Association (1999, p.1) and other sources say the reason for this lack of movement is social media taking up valuable time and promoting a sedentary lifestyle, less time because of school, no access to the education, resources, or equipment needed, and the list goes on (American Heart Association, 1999). Moving on to the elderly, the Center for Disease Control (2019, p.5) reports about 27.5% of adults aged 50 and over reported no physical activity. The reason for this lack of physical activity (besides the biological process of aging) according to Better Health is “the high cost of sports, preference to sedentary activities” and access problems for those with fixed income (Better Health Channel, 2012, p.4).

The reason a person doesn’t exercise, as seen in the previous paragraph, depends heavily on the person and where in life they are at. Something I found interesting, though, was that the commonality between both teens and older people in those reasons was the lack of access. These

accesses are to education about physical fitness, to places to workout, to time for oneself, and to resources, which are all extremely important. Access is a huge motivation and obstacle for people; what is meant by this is that if we all had access to a free gym, free equipment and free resources we would all have a higher chance of wanting to make time. But many don't, in fact the American Heart Organization (2018, p.1,3,4) says some of these barriers may include "lack of time...lack of motivation...lack of resources/equipment", and so much more (American Heart Association, 2018, p.1,3,4). So, is that it? Is that the reality of physical activity, if you have all those things you get to exercise and if you don't then you don't? The answer isn't so simple.

The lack of access in America and even in the world is astounding and doesn't look great for people of middle to lower income. A solution to this is a combination of many things. No access to a gym or equipment? There are so many free online classes for activities such as Pilates, yoga, tai-chi and more. If this isn't the type of workout you're looking for walking, running, HIIT workouts, and even swimming are amazing for something faster paced. Finding education and resources is just as easy, it's all at your fingertips using a phone or computer to research. For both of these access issues, the American Heart Association (2018, p.6) suggests "select activities that require minimal facilities or equipment, such as walking, jogging, jumping rope or calisthenics. Identify inexpensive, convenient resources in your community, such as parks and recreation programs, worksite wellness groups, walking clubs, etc." (American Heart Association Editors, 2018, p.3). Finally, access to time. This isn't as easy to come by because you can't just get it on your phone. In fact, it's the exact opposite, getting off your phone. The average person, according to TIME, spends up 28.5 hours a week on their phones. That's 28.5 hours a week one could going on walks, lifting in the gym or getting that home workout in. There is time spent in a day on things we don't need to spend time on while other parts of our

lives are lacking. Now these problems and solutions are only the ones I decided to mention and there are, of course, other access problems out there such as transport. The point is there are so many access problems, but there are also many access solutions.

The solutions that have been proposed previously are personal solutions; solutions that a singular person can use to try to overcome barriers to exercise. The bigger question is, is there an overarching solution to the various problems? Again, the answer isn't that simple. Maybe the solution is to throw money at the problem, much like the US has/is already doing. Although we have seen that this still doesn't work. An article published by Global Wellness Institute (McGroarty) explains, "While physical activity is a massive \$264.6 billion commercial segment in the US, there is a major disconnect: Sedentary lives, obesity and chronic disease are escalating right alongside the fitness market's explosive growth. Sadly, America's high spend doesn't translate into high participation rates. In fact, the US ranks 20th in physical activity participation (58 percent)" (McGroarty, n.d). Plus, putting money towards it wouldn't solve the lack of time people seem to have. My proposal for a solution to all of these issues is that the US create a physical activity model, like many nations around the world do. The first model that could be easily adopted is Prescribed Exercise, and according to McGroarty's article "Doctors in the UK and Singapore are actually *prescribing* exercise with public support and infrastructure to back it up" (McGroarty, n.d). The other model is to adopt is Incorporate Physical Activity into Each Day. The same article (McGroarty) describes it as "The Active Schools initiative, a public-private partnership working with more than 23,000 schools around the US to integrate 60 minutes of movement and play into the day for every K-12 student, is a good start" (McGroarty, n.d.). With the governments help, this could also be easily integrated into companies big and small where workers

are sedentary all day, a mandatory half to full hour of going on a walk, going to a gym, riding a bike and more.

To conclude, specifically the elderly and teenagers in America lack in much needed physical activity. There are many benefits to this physical activity although there is an obvious access problem for engaging in fitness. There is also a very prominent need for many types of access for different people. Some solutions to this problem are helping oneself to online exercise training, budgeting time wisely, and finding what kind of exercise you like. Overarching solutions to all of those problems are for the US government to adopt a physical exercise model like those of other countries as explained above. One might argue that physical activity is not a necessity, but the facts and data prove that this just isn't true, and that sedentary behavior (such as being on one's phone or electronics too much) is a true problem in our world.

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