

# Why strength training should be standard

The benefits are obvious, so what are you waiting for?



Residents Henny and John enjoying the gym at the Henley on Broadwater.

The new year has started with a great focus on active ageing, as the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) reports that the top fitness trend for Australia is 'Fitness Programs for Older Adults', based on surveys distributed to health and fitness professionals.

The leader of the investigation in Australia, Chris Alexander, stated that Australian industry professionals recognise the need for fitness services to support the health and welfare of older Australians, as the average age of the population increases.

ACSM also recently published a paper on the health benefits of resistance exercise, in which they discussed the role of strength training in relation to mobility and falls, cognitive function, cancer, metabolic health and mortality.

The authors recommend that strength training be presented in physical activity guidelines together with aerobic training, due to the beneficial impacts on physical and cognitive function, among others. They also added that the positive effects, such as prevention of disability, reduction of falls and improvement of cognitive ability, are likely to be high motivators for resistance training.

Previously, in 2021, *The Journal of Nutrition, Health and Ageing* published a literature review giving detailed guidelines around appropriate exercise modalities for optimising exercise to slow down physiological signs of ageing, as well as prevent and treat disease. The authors' message was clear: exercise is medicine when prescribed appropriately and controlled for the individual, just like any other medical treatment.

The final phrase of the article should be a guideline to everyone in the industry: *"Considering the accumulated evidence of the benefits of exercise in frail older adults over many decades, it is not justifiable to not prescribe physical exercise to these individuals, and one of the main challenges for the future is to integrate exercise programmes as a mandatory part of the care of pre-frail/frail older patients in all hospital, outpatient, and aged care settings."*

Over time this is becoming more apparent to providers across Australia – from community care, retirement living and residential aged care sectors.

A successful community care model is Southern Cross Care (SA, NT & VIC) Inc, which has rolled out their Health and Wellness program, 'Better for Life', across multiple locations with six sites fitted with a gym and offering exercise physiology services.

While in retirement living, the Henley on Broadwater retirement village at Southport (QLD) is a wonderful example of an active retirement community, with more than 100 residents out of 131 signing up to their health club and training almost daily at the gym, reaping the benefits.

In relation to residential aged care, providers can look to the Sunbeam project – an evidence-based strength and balance program – which was recommended as a suitable allied health program by the Australian Government in 2021, following outstanding results from the pilot. Research findings showed a 55 per cent reduction in falls, as well as verified cost savings. This program is now rolled out in hundreds of residential aged care sites.

When considering setting up a gym for older people, the kind of equipment selected is important. The Sunbeam research study used HUR equipment, with the maintenance program also using flexible modalities. Designed for the older market, HUR strength training equipment uses air pressure to create resistance allowing for a close to zero starting load and 100g increment progression of resistance, with the equipment designed with the ease of access in mind. Due to these features, HUR has become a global leader in providing equipment for older adults – whether for home or in community living.

With greater awareness of the value of exercise as medicine, and the fact that it can benefit quality of life enormously, there really is no time like the present, to consider how your aged care services can support exercise and strength training programs. Should you wish to discuss your needs with HUR Australia, our trained allied health professionals would be only too happy to help.

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