

## Staying Active as you Age

Within Western Newfoundland, roughly 20% of the population is aged 65 years and older. This percentage is expected to continue to increase. Healthy Aging and health promotion are priorities for Western Health.

A high number of older adults report disabilities from an injury or chronic illness such as arthritis, osteoporosis, or diabetes. As we get older, our bodies experience many changes such as decreased muscle strength and decreased flexibility/movement in joints which can result in a decrease of balance and mobility. These changes in mobility can contribute to an increased risk of slips, trips and falls. In fact, one in three individuals age 65 years and older experience a fall yearly. Falls increase an individual's risk of injury, disability, and even death.

### **What can you do to help prevent this?**

Regular physical activity is one way to reduce the risk of falls and their consequences. Regular physical activity can also help slow decline due to chronic disease and age related conditions. It can improve balance, strengthen muscles, and improve the flexibility of joints which help to decrease risk of falls.

In addition to preventing falls, being physically active on a regular basis helps older adults stay physically and mentally healthy, sleep better and have more energy, feel more relaxed and positive, and stay independent longer. It also provides an opportunity to meet new people and have fun.

The World Health Organization recommends that older adults maintain physical activity to improve quality of life. The goal should be 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity, five days a week.

Western Newfoundland has a wide variety of year-round and seasonal fun, physical activities available such as: weight training, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, dancing, yoga, curling, bowling, swimming, aquasize, Zumba, low impact aerobics, and many beautiful walking trails.

Although many activities within our communities are promoted for all age groups, there are some organizations that offer physical activity programs specifically for older adults. Some examples within the Western region are the YMCA in Stephenville and Corner Brook, Grenfell Campus, Memorial University in Corner Brook, Corner Brook Centre Bowl, Deer Lake Aquatic Centre, and the Bruce II Sports Complex in Port Aux Basques.

Many activities you enjoy may be continued as you age with some minor changes. Before you start any new activity, it is advisable to consult with your physician. Try to choose a familiar, low risk activity that can be done with a buddy. Start with short periods of activity and gradually increase the time and amount of exercise as your endurance improves. Choose activities that improve balance, muscle strength, flexibility and endurance. Many exercises can be modified to include the use of a cane or other mobility aid, and can be done sitting or standing. It's important to choose exercises that you enjoy and can help with your day to day activities.

Regular physical activity has many benefits for healthy aging and it's never too late to start. Stay active and have fun!

Written by:

Deanne Wareham, Physiotherapist Western Health