

Aging Adults – Are They Healthy?

Aging is a natural process for the body. Each year everyone becomes one year older and their body changes. But does exercise and sport help the body age? Is your body healthier and more fit because of sport? These are questions many researchers are trying to find an answer to as they study the relationship between aging and sport.

Several demographic variables were suggested to influence physical activity among the elderly. Gender, age, and where you live were in several studies to demonstrate that these factors had a bearing on the physical condition at a later age in life. Other factors, such as social class, education, motivation, playing youth sports, and general health issues determine the well being of older adults.

Gender is a huge concept in determining who has physical activity in their lives. Men are more concerned about intrinsic motivation. This would include pleasure and satisfaction in the activity performed. They participate for self-achievement and enjoy competition. Women are more interested in extrinsic motivation where receiving rewards and approval are more important (Molanorouzi, Khoo & Morris, 2015). They also participate for better appearance and good looks (Tischer, Hartmann-Tews & Combrink, 2011). Women and girls are less involved in sport than males. The older the women, the less percentage of them are participating in sport. They come from a masculine culture where only men competed in sports (Tischer, et al., 2011). But in recent years, women are participating in more physical activities and attributing a culture of the general population to be involved in sports.

Gender also determines the types of sports played. Men prefer jogging, cycling, golf, and team sports. Women are more likely to participate in aerobic exercise, swimming, yoga and pilates for flexibility. Women rate high “to prevent frailty, to train flexibility, to test

performance, and to stay independent of care in the long term” (Tischer, et al., 2011, p. 88). This may come from the gender ideology and the culture of the social worlds of the participants.

Several studies have examined and researched childhood sport and activities to see if it has an effect on their health at an older age. Results are mixed and hard to confirm, but generally participation in sports, especially as a youth, will increase your health outcome in later life. Data states physical activity helps young children and adolescence learn healthy habits, promotes self-esteem, and fit bodies.

If the social world you live in as a child incorporates sports, you are more likely to continue sports as you age. The question of national, regional, selected age groups, gender, and social class all have a bearing on whether you participate or not (Tischer, et al., 2011). National and regional implications have a direct bearing on the culture associated with an area. Some cities and countries promote activity and exercise, outdoor living, and an active lifestyle. The daily way of life promotes this style of living or diminishes it. In the cold, wet areas of countries, they may experience problems getting people active. In southern or warm areas, more activities can be achieved outside for longer periods of time.

Research has shown that social class and social economic level affect the level of activity, especially in the older generation. There is a correlation between participation in sports and social class. Social classes that participate in more sports have higher incomes and more education (Tischer, et al., 2011). They also have access to facilities, are members of private clubs, and can afford private lessons and treatments. These increase the attendance level of participants in a high social class. The lower social class is less active mainly because they do not have the resources to participate.

Generally, people are living longer than past history. They are more aware of nutrition and physical activity to improve life expectancy. Involvement in sport is a release of tension, improved mental alertness, sense of accomplishment, controls anxiety and stress (Rudman, 1989).

When a physical activity is performed, it helps your mental state. It reduces stress and anxiety, changes your mood, and contributes to self-esteem. This helps prevent depression among all ages. The benefits of sport and activity provide a way to release emotional feelings and anger to encourage better health. These health benefits are good for the body and quality of life.

Physical activity and eating healthy are promoted to fight obesity, a growing problem in our culture. This problem has multiple effects on people and diminishes the overall health causing problems with the heart, joints, diabetes, hypertension, asthma and cancer (Gotova, 2015). Those who are overweight have a higher risk of these diseases as they age. The way to overcome the problem of being overweight is “the combination of intense aerobic activity, proper diet, rest and no stress” (Gotova, 2015, p. 119). Aerobic activities would include walking, jogging, cycling, and swimming.

“Motivation has been shown to be a crucial factor in maintaining physical activity” (Molanorouzi, et al, 2015, p. 1). The statistics are staggering for the risk factor of inactivity. Around 6% of deaths in the world are related to inactivity. It is estimated 30% of heart disease, 27% of diabetes, and 21% of breast and colon cancer can be associated with inactivity (Molanorouzi, et al., 2015). Even though this information is available, some are still not easily motivated to participate. An intrinsic motivation needs to be present to feel satisfied and helps to continue activities longer. Older adults are motivated by health concerns. They are not as

concerned with competition because they prefer no institutional control. Competition also reduces motivation because it is not desirable to lose.

One study by Dohle and Wansink (2013) looked at high school varsity athletes and questioned if it was a strong predictor of physical activity fifty years later. It was determined that it did have some impact on the results and that 70 year olds were involved in more physical activity. It also noted that it had an influence on the health status of the men analyzed. These men were World War II veterans and prescreened as healthy young adults. The study revealed that the physical activity they participated in at the high school age was a suggested way for the older generation to benefit from an active lifestyle.

Another study looking at barriers and involvement in a corporation activity program. People of all ages followed patterns of why they did or did not participate in the program. The results of the study followed the life cycle of three groups of adults and the barriers and how participation changed as people aged. In the under-35 age group, motivation was the biggest barrier. The results of the middle-aged group showed that lack of time was the reason for the barrier. The older adults had problems with motivation and fatigue. The benefits were less defined but the younger age group used the activity to reduce stress and to enhance physical attractiveness. The middle-aged group enjoyed the family fun and social reasons as benefits while the older adults liked the social networks and involvement. (Rudman, 1989). Every age had pros and cons for being involved with physical activity and showed how it changed among different ages.

Coakley (2015) noted the following:

It is difficult to track changes in how people integrate sport participation into their lives as they age, but from what we know at this time it appears that as people age, they prefer

modified versions of competitive activities that are organized to emphasize the pleasure of movement, social experiences, and controlled challenges (p. 313).

The ability to continue to participate in physical activity is important to some older adults. According to Coakley (2015), “staying in sports enables them to maintain their sense of physical competence, experience social and mental stimulation, and feel resilient in the face of advancing age” (p. 313). Maintaining the abilities and stamina is emphasized more than the performance. Competition and winning is not the goal. Fun and social interaction is more of the focus. This helps the physical and mental properties of good health. In middle age, an informal organizational framework is more prominent and younger ages like the competition of power and performance sports (Tischer, et al., 2011).

Participation in sport should be a life-long endeavor. “Overall it is likely that images of older people who are active, fit, healthy, and accomplished athletes will become more visible over time” (Coakley, 2015, p.314). This is seen in television commercials where beauty products or fitness equipment portrays someone over fifty years of age looking younger. The marketing of similar products is successful with the older adults because they are role models for health and beauty.

Generally, the older the age group, the lower the participation in physical activity (Tischer, et al., 2011). Whether it is because of pain, fatigue, lack of interest, or disease, people need to keep moving. A sedentary lifestyle is unhealthy for the body. Joints and muscles become painful and loose function when not used. This is why so many elderly patients go to the doctor. They do not participate in movement of sport to keep their bodies viable. Participating in sport prevents disease and prolongs life.

Aging adults can become healthier with sport incorporated in their lives. The physical activity provides benefits from disease, mental stress, and a more active lifestyle. People are living longer and will need to be proactive in taking care of their bodies. “Sport is an integral part of a full and healthy life. Sport is the key that opens the door to longevity and health and well-being of people of all ages” (Gotova, 2015, p.119).

## References

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