

London to open 1st exercise area for older people

February 10 2010, By RAPHAEL G. SATTER , Associated Press Writer



Susan Edgar 65-years-old is seen on a piece of fitness machinery in a play area for older people at Dam Head Park in the Blackley inner-city suburb of Manchester, England, Wednesday Feb. 10, 2010. The playground promotes physical activity for those later in life and such exercise areas aimed at the elderly are popular in Europe and Asia . (AP Photo/Jon Super).

(AP) -- Swinging London will take on a whole new connotation for the capital's aging baby boomers, who will soon get their own specially designed outdoor playground.

The park will offer low-impact [exercise equipment](#) to help [older people](#) improve their balance and flexibility and tone muscles that may not have

been tested for decades.

"Every park has a children's playground, very few have playgrounds for adults, and none have playgrounds for the elderly," said Madeline Elsdon, whose local residents' association has won funding for the playground, which is planned for London's popular Hyde Park.

"We wanted something that would be of long-term benefit to people, so we came up with this idea for an older person's playground."

Exercise areas aimed at the elderly are popular in Europe and Asia, and there's already a U.K. precedent - an over-60 playground billed as Britain's first opened in Manchester's Dam Head Park two years ago. The equipment there was still seeing use Wednesday - with [senior citizens](#) swinging their legs and working their hips on the machines despite temperatures that hovered around freezing.

Elsdon said the Hyde Park playground, which is due to be built by this spring, will have six pieces of equipment bought in Denmark, including a stationary bicycle, a cross-trainer and a sit-up bench.

British group Age Concern, which works to help the elderly, said the playground sounded like a great idea.

"Frankly, it's the first time I've ever heard of such a thing," spokesman Stefano Gelmini said. "It looks like a nice initiative."

The group's charity director, Michelle Mitchell, said in an e-mail that the playground "could be a great way to encourage older people to exercise and socialize."

"Many older people aren't exercising enough," she said, adding that working out with others their own age could help older people alleviate

feelings of loneliness and depression.

Eldon said she had been "absolutely overwhelmed by the number of people who have shown an interest" in the free play area.

Westminster City Council, which gave 40,000 pounds (\$60,000) to fund the project, said a sign would identify the area as the "Hyde Park Senior [Playground](#)" but anyone of any age was welcome to use it.

It raises the question - why not just go to the gym?

Eldon said older people have been hard hit by Britain's recession and many found gyms too intimidating in the first place.

"Too much firm flesh," she said, laughing.

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