

Even the very elderly and frail can benefit from exercise

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A study carried out by Dr. Louis Bherer, PhD (Psychology), Laboratory Director and Researcher at the Institut universitaire de gériatrie de Montréal (IUGM), an institution affiliated with Université de Montréal, has shown that all seniors, even those considered frail, can enjoy the benefits of exercise in terms of their physical and cognitive faculties and quality of life and that these benefits appear after only three months.

This discovery is excellent news, as increased life expectancy has also increased the number of frail seniors in our communities. In geriatrics, frailness is characterized by decreased functional reserves in an individual, which increases vulnerability to stressors and the risk of [adverse health effects](#). Frailty is associated with a higher risk of falls, hospitalizations, [cognitive decline](#) and [psychological distress](#). Currently, 7% of seniors aged 65 to 74, 18% of those aged 75 to 84, and 37% of seniors over the age of 85 are considered frail.

"For the first time, frail [senior citizens](#) have participated in a study on exercise thanks to the collaboration of [medical doctors](#) at IUGM, who provided close [medical supervision](#). My team was able to demonstrate that sedentary and frail senior citizens can benefit from major improvements not only in terms of physical function but also [brain function](#), such as memory, and quality of life," stated Dr. Bherer.

"We hope to adapt the exercise program used in the study and make it available to the public through the seniors' health promotion centre that the IUGM is developing. We believe that by transferring our research

findings to the public, we will help both healthy and frail senior citizens stay at home longer," concluded the researcher.

Research summary

In this study, 43 of the 83 participants between the ages of 61 and 89 years, some of whom were considered frail, took part in group exercises (3 times a week for 12 weeks), while the control group of 40 participants did not follow the [exercise program](#). All participants were evaluated one week before the start of the program and at the end of the program for physical capacity, quality of life and cognitive health. Compared to the control group, trained participants showed larger improvement in physical capacity (functional capacities and physical endurance), cognitive performance (executive functions, processing speed and working memory) and quality of life (overall quality of life, recreational activities, social and family relationships and physical health). Most importantly, benefits were equivalent among frail and non-frail participants suggesting that there is't never too late to engage in exercise intervention programs . These findings were published online on the Web site of the Journals of Gerontology. This research received financial support from the IUGM's Comité aviseur de la recherche clinique (CAREC) along with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

Provided by University of Montreal

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