

Exercise reduces caregiver's burden in dementia care

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Exercise in older adults, even at an advanced stage of dementia, is an important strategy to maintain independence in everyday living and to promote quality of life. Credit: LVR, Matthias Jung

The research group "geriatric psychiatry in motion" of the German Sport

University Cologne and the LVR-Hospital Cologne develop and evaluate exercise programmes for geriatric mental health care. The latest results from a study in acute dementia care indicate a special exercise programme is not only effective for the patients themselves, but also reduces the professional caregiver's burden caused by neuropsychiatric symptoms.

Short-bout exercise sessions of 20 minutes several times per day are key aspects of this 'exercise-carrousel'—a new exercise programme specially tailored for patients suffering from dementia, which has been developed and evaluated at the LVR-Hospital in Cologne. Throughout the day, the exercises are applied in small groups of patients—twice in the morning, twice in the afternoon. "With these recurrent activity and rest periods, we are not only trying to increase [physical activity](#), but also aiming at stabilising their day-night rhythm," highlights Dr. Tim Fleiner, head of the research group. The novel exercise approach is feasible in the [clinical setting](#)—more than half of the patients are physically active for over 150 minutes per week, thus even meeting the recommendation for healthy older adults despite suffering from dementia.

With the same level of psychotropic medication, the patients show clinically relevant improvements in neuropsychiatric symptoms compared to a control group—in particular, agitated behavior and lability improved.

As a special side effect, recently published findings show important improvements in the patient's environment: participating in the exercise-carrousel reduces the perceived burden of the patient's caregivers. "Reducing the burden of the patient's caregivers and their relatives is a key aspect in [dementia](#) care. That we can achieve an improvement for the patient and his/her environment through a special [exercise](#) programme is novel and important for the health care of older people" states PD Dr. Peter Haussermann, head physician of the Department of

Geriatric Psychiatry at the LVR-Hospital Cologne.

An early online version of this paper detailing the findings has been published and is scheduled for publication in the March issue of the *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*.

More information: Fleiner, T et al. A Structured Physical Exercise Program Reduces Professional Caregiver's Burden Caused by Neuropsychiatric Symptoms in Acute Dementia Care: Randomized Controlled Trial Results. *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease* (2020).

Provided by German Sport University

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