

# The unexpected benefits of tailored exercise for aged care residents

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Tailored exercise programs led by accredited exercise physiologists don't just provide physical benefits for residents living in aged care—they improve mental wellbeing and social engagement, according to new

Edith Cowan University (ECU) research.

A series of studies led by ECU Associate Professor Annette Raynor from the School of Medical and Health Sciences has investigated the benefits of a 12-week [exercise](#) program delivered by an accredited exercise physiologist for older adults living in three different residential aged care facilities in Perth.

According to [health authorities](#), more than 50 percent of the 230,000 Australian residents living in aged care experience [symptoms of depression](#).

The new studies have provided preliminary evidence for the feasibility and effectiveness of an accredited exercise physiologist-led therapy program to promote residents' physical and psychosocial wellbeing.

Associate Professor Raynor said previous research on exercise in aged care had tended to focus on the physical effects of resistance training and balance programs on fall prevention and in promoting functional capacity and mobility.

"This focus on the physical outcomes from exercise often decreases the significance of psychosocial benefits, such as enhanced independence, elevated mood and reduced agitation that can also be achieved with exercise," Associate Professor Raynor said.

Key findings:

- The program led to improvements in residents' sense of independence, autonomy and [social engagement](#).
- Residents demonstrated improvements in balance, strength, flexibility and mobility.
- The individualized structure of the program enabled residents to

foster [personal connections](#) and accommodated specific needs relating to cognitive and physical impairments.

## **More than just physical benefits**

While the [exercise programs](#) achieved physical improvements in balance, strength and flexibility, other significant benefits such as increased connectedness and motivation were also observed.

Associate Professor Raynor said staff had noticed that residents were coming out of their rooms more often, joining in activities, their mood was enhanced and they were generally more happy.

"One lady we worked with had experienced a stroke. She couldn't dress herself or go to the toilet unassisted. Prior to her stroke she had been very independent and found her current situation frustrating.

"Through the exercise program she regained some independence, was able to join classes, choose her own clothes and go to the bathroom on her own," Associate Professor Raynor said.

"These are the changes we were looking for—an increase in strength and functional ability are great, but the extra benefits that this enhanced physical ability brings to the residents' quality of life demonstrated the meaningfulness of the program."

## **No one-size-fits all approach**

Associate Professor Raynor said exercise interventions in aged care in WA were typically not delivered by exercise physiologists, who are specifically trained to deliver tailored exercise programs.

"Because this exercise program was led by an exercise physiologist, they could prescribe and deliver one-on-one or group sessions tailored specifically to each individual.

"This also meant they could build personal relationships and adapt the exercise to the residents' needs," she said.

The paper *It's not just physical: Exercise physiologist-led exercise program promotes functional and psychosocial health outcomes in [aged care](#)* is published in in the *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity*.

**More information:** Annette J. Raynor et al. *It's Not Just Physical: Exercise Physiologist-Led Exercise Program Promotes Functional and Psychosocial Health Outcomes in Aged Care*, *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity* (2019). [DOI: 10.1123/japa.2019-0088](https://doi.org/10.1123/japa.2019-0088)

Provided by Edith Cowan University

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