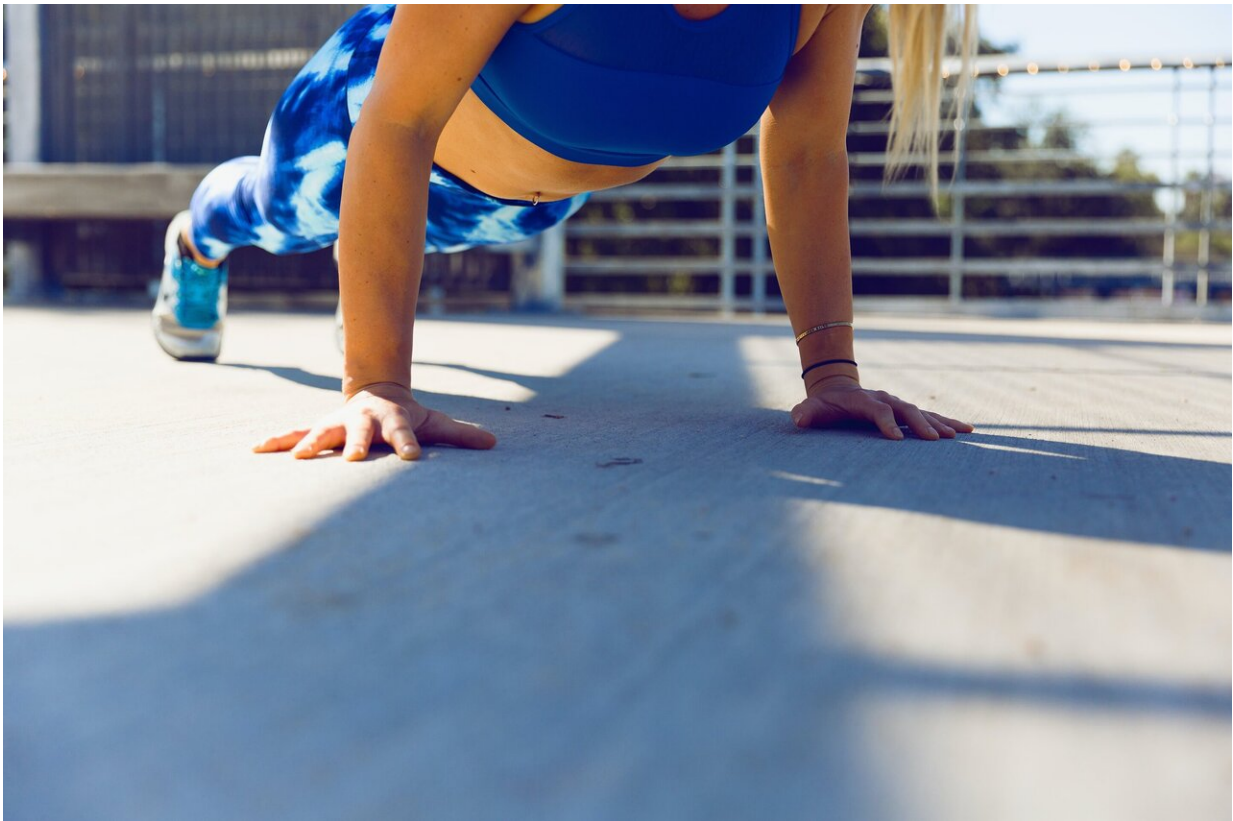


Exercise prescriptions needed to get patients active

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A nationwide health initiative, that will be rolled out widely in GP practices next year, will only work if formal referrals and prescriptions are used, according to a new study led by the University of St Andrews.

Social prescribing is a [health](#) care initiative which aims to help patients experiencing a wide range of physical health, [mental health](#) and wellbeing issues, including obesity and loneliness, to improve their health and wellbeing by connecting them with relevant opportunities in their [local communities](#).

The health professional connects a patient with a link worker who, following consultation with the patient, connects him or her with an appropriate community-based opportunity, such as a jogging group or a befriending service.

The Scottish Government has committed to recruiting 250 social prescribing link workers by 2021 with Fife Health and Social Care Partnership aiming to have link workers in every GP practice in Fife by 2022.

The new research, funded by the NHS Fife Endowment Fund and published in Health and Social Care in the Community, reviewed the evidence on methods of connecting primary care patients with community-based physical activity programs in the UK.

It identified that when a link worker was employed, methods involving formal referral or prescription, rather than informal signposting, worked best for connecting patients with, and enhancing their uptake of, physical activity programs.

This may be, at least partially, due to those methods actively facilitating patient uptake of physical activity programs, rather than leaving patients to do all the communication and organization of uptake by themselves.

Lead researcher on the study, Dr. Kathryn Cunningham, Chartered Health Psychologist and Research Fellow in the School of Medicine at the University of St Andrews, said: "Our findings are of particular

significance given the growing focus on social prescribing.

"They address the lack of evidence about which methods work best for connecting patients with community-based opportunities to improve health and wellbeing and will help with the design of effective social prescribing schemes."

Dr. Gozde Ozakinci, Senior Lecturer in Health Psychology in the School of Medicine at the University of St Andrews, added: "Our review also shows that we need rigorous evaluation of, and transparent reporting of these schemes so that the knowledge is easily available to progress social prescribing practice and research."

The paper, "Methods of connecting primary care patients with community-based physical activity opportunities: A realist scoping review," by Kathryn B Cunningham, Rayna H Rogowsky, Sharon A Carstairs, Frank Sullivan and Gozde Ozakinci, is published in *Health and Social Care*.

More information: Kathryn B. Cunningham et al. Methods of connecting primary care patients with community-based physical activity opportunities: A realist scoping review, *Health & Social Care in the Community* (2020). [DOI: 10.1111/hsc.13186](https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.13186)

Provided by University of St Andrews

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