

# Finding the Fitness Fit: Perceptions of Older Adults Participating in Community-Based Exercise Programs

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## Introduction/ Background

As the American patient population ages, falls and fall related injury prevention are essential to lowering healthcare costs, maintaining patient independence, and decreasing hospitalizations<sup>1</sup>. Lack of physical activity has been identified as a risk factor for falling. Fewer than 25% of adults between the ages of 65 and 74 meet the CDC guidelines for physical activity<sup>2</sup>. Nearly half of falls can be prevented by well-designed exercise programs that challenge balance and are performed consistently for 2 hours a week over a 6-month period<sup>3</sup>. Formalized physical activity such as a community-based exercise program is vital to reducing the degenerative effects of aging by strengthening muscle and improving balance. This study aims to identify the goals, benefits, facilitators and barriers of 40 surveyed adults 70 and older who have actively participated in a community-based exercise program in the Greater Boston Area in an effort to promote patient-centered programs that cater to the preferences of the older adult population.

## Methods

The study used a convenience sample of 40 participants from a national falls prevention study, who were referred to a community-based exercise program by a nurse specializing in falls prevention. An 18 question REDCAP survey tool was created using criteria from the Sherrington meta-analysis and CDC guidelines for older adult exercise. Descriptive statistics were used to quantify the dichotomous survey results and responses to the open-ended feedback questions were coded using thematic analysis.

## Results

Individual factors, class characteristics and gender preferences influenced older adult participation in community-based exercise. Key barriers such as disability status and gender imbalances were individual factors that deterred patients. The class instructor and social cohesion facilitated adherence to the program.

## Discussion/ Conclusions

Identifying participant goals and barriers may allow for community-based exercise programs to tailor curriculums to patient preference. While the CDC guidelines provide a useful starting framework for older adult recommendation guidelines, providers and organizers of geriatric physical activity must tailor their referrals to a patient's gender and motivational characteristics.

## References

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