

# Older Adults

## Myriad of Contributions for Older Adults

**The ways in which physical activity and recreation can enhance the life skills of older adults contributes not only to quality of life, but the ability to continue independent living.**

- Active Options, a program of the Foothills Park and Recreation District designed to provide high quality fitness experiences for older adults in their own community, was part of a study to determine potential health benefits accrued to participants in this program. Continuing participants in the program gained significant health benefits including: two less visits to a doctor for treatment of a health problem; one less nights stay in a hospital; better perceived health; and increases self-efficacy, the belief that one can complete specific tasks. Over time, Active Options participants had some significant physical improvements as well including: decreased heart rate and blood pressure; improved back flexibility; and increased muscular strength.

Source: [Orsega-Smith](#), [Payne](#), [Katzenmeyer](#), and [Godbey](#). *Parks and Recreation*, October 2000

- A study cited in the *New England Journal of Medicine* suggests that mentally challenging activities may reduce the risk of dementia in older adults. The study conducted at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York asked adults how often they participated in leisure activities such as playing cards or chess, reading, doing crossword puzzles, dancing, etc. The most active people had a 63% lower risk of dementia than those who were less active. People who played the hardest received the greatest benefit as evidenced by the adults who did crossword puzzles four times a week having a 47% lower risk of dementia than those who did a crossword puzzle once a week. Reading reduced the risk of dementia for study participants by 35%; playing a musical instrument by 69%; and frequent dancing by 76% (*USA Today*).
- A recent study from the University of Pittsburg found that the more physical activity one gets, the longer a person will be able to live independently. This study followed older women ages 50 and 65 for 17 years. Those women who were sedentary over the study period were 1 and ½ times more likely to have difficulty with daily activities such as shopping and household chores in comparison to the more active women in the study. Even physical activity that is started later in life can contribute to this independence.

- A national study on aging and creativity and its potential benefit for people 65 years of age and older is currently underway in San Francisco, New York, and Washington, DC. The intent of the research is to determine if participation in arts and creative programming would result in fewer health declines among the elderly. Early results exceeded expectations as participants in the arts/creative programming reported falling less often, feeling less depressed and lonely, requiring fewer medications, and becoming more active than the comparison group (*USA Today*).
- Adults participating in Hearts N' Parks Programs primarily at public senior centers significantly improved their knowledge of overweight/obesity risks, physical activity, causes of high blood pressure, and ways to control cholesterol levels. Post-test scores also suggested healthier attitudes towards heart-healthy eating and physical activity (*NIH News*, National Institutes of Health, Department of Health and Human Services).