



Activity Programs

SOCIAL ISOLATION

This evidence theme on activity programs for people in aged care is a summary of one of the key topics identified by a scoping review of social isolation research.

Key points

- Activity programs for older people intended to reduce social isolation and improve overall health include educational, social, and physical activity programs.
- We only found one review focusing specifically on the effectiveness of an activity program in aged care for reducing social isolation.
- This review found that an indoor gardening program reduced loneliness and provided residents with a positive social experience.

What are activity programs?

Activity programs for older people that are intended to reduce social isolation and improve overall health include educational, social, and physical activity programs. [1] Educational programs include teaching older people about the use of the internet and technology. [2] Social programs include activities to facilitate social connection with others such as playing cards or participating in games. [2] Physical activity programs include fitness and recreational activities such as exercise walking groups or gardening groups. [2,3] In aged care settings, a wide selection of activity programs is usually available for older people to engage in.

What is known about activity programs in aged care?

We found one review that reported on activity programs for older people in a residential aged care setting. This reported that:

- An indoor gardening program conducted once a week for eight weeks made residents less lonely based on the loneliness scale, gave them a positive social experience, and improved their social activities and level of physical activity compared with no gardening participation. [3] This finding was based on one primary study. [4]
- Participants of the gardening program were taught how to do gardening activities and the participants planted their own plants. There was no need for prior knowledge about gardening. [3, 4]

The review authors point out that this study only included a small number of participants. We also note the lack of research specifically examining the issue of activities for reducing social isolation in aged care, despite it being an important consideration for this group of people.

What can an individual do?

- Ask what type of activities interest individual older people in aged care.
- Encourage older people to take part in activity programs like gardening or anything that they would enjoy.
- Encourage people interested in volunteering to enquire with a facility that welcomes volunteers for supporting meaningful and engaging activities for older people.

What can an organisation do?

- Provide opportunities for older people in aged care to be involved in activity programs such as gardening.
- Identify other possible activity programs that residents may want to engage in. These programs might be available outside the facility.
- Engage a lifestyle coordinator to implement activity programs to ensure social connectedness. These could be as simple as movie events and card games, or other activities based on the interests and preferences of the older people.

References

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3. Franck L, Molyneux N, Parkinson L. Systematic review of interventions addressing social isolation and depression in aged care clients. Qual Life Res. 2016;25(6):1395-407.
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