

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTHY AGEING

**Dr. Vinod Kumar**

Physical activity as an integral part of our daily lives is fast disappearing as we continue to increasingly depend on machines, cars, computers, TVs, online shopping and banking, making us more vulnerable to sedentary life and life style diseases including dementia. Numerous Senior fitness and physical activity classes are available in the Western world. Senior Athletic Meets, Events and National Senior Games Associations also exist there. However, unlike past these activities are not the natural and integral part of life and appear artificial requiring extra time, cost and effort.

In India, the second most populous nation, precise status of physical activity in the lives of senior citizens, where they often face physical and financial marginalization in a highly diverse socio-cultural society is not known. Facilities described above with respect to Western countries hardly exist and sporting activities are rare among Indian elderly. They are just told to get engaged in certain types of exercises without adequate medical supervision to guide them for undertaking the type and extent of physical activities. Ordinarily, recommended exercises comprise Aerobic exercises like brisk walking, cycling, swimming or gardening, Strengthening exercises like climbing stairs, carrying groceries, push ups or weight lifting, Balancing exercises like one leg raise, stand/sit without hand support or heel toe walk and Stretching exercises like yoga and muscle stretching exercises.

Information on the types of physical activity among elderly in Asia indicates following four types of physical activities in order of their frequency and this may be true of India also.

1. Work and occupation related physical activity is the commonest e. g. agriculture, other manual workers, petty traders etc.
2. Household related physical activity is the next commonest e. g. kitchen help, personal chores, family caring, playing with grandchildren etc.
3. Leisure related physical activity is the next e. g. walking, running, yoga, dancing, swimming, sporting and others.
4. Transportation related physical activity is the least common e. g. slow walking, cycling, climbing, negotiating bus and train stations.

While all the above physical activities are important, more research is needed and health care providers need to give more specific consultations to the elderly people in this country on the basis of relative usefulness of different exercises to achieve healthy ageing. They should also mind the specific medical disorder that may be present in an individual elderly person before prescribing an exercise. It may be noted that physical activity is good for prevention and control of a large number of disorders like dementia, diabetes, blood pressure, heart problems and a host of other conditions provided this is prescribed under medical supervision. There is good evidence that physical activity also lifts mood, improves mental health and promotes longevity.

Quote:

“if exercise could be dispensed as a pill, it would be most precious medicine in the world.”

(In: Newsletter of Alzheimer's & Related Disorders Society of India, Delhi Chapter on the occasion of Alzheimer's Day International, September 21, 2022).