

PHYSICAL EXERCISE AS A PANACEA FOR UNPRODUCTIVE AGEING AMONG THE ELDERLY.

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Abstract.

Physical exercise has been described as any physical activity that is planned, structured and performed for the main purpose of achieving improving physical fitness of an individual or group. It involves physical exertion that can increase the heart rate beyond resting levels. Regular participation in physical exercise has been found to prevent onset and cure of various diseases and other health issues thereby preserving physical and mental health. Moreover scientific evidence has supported the power of physical exercise in the prevention and treatment of numerous chronic and/or age related diseases such as musculoskeletal, metabolic and cardiovascular disorders. Exercises have helped in the context of reducing the risk of their onset and counteract their progression. This paper therefore discussed regular participation in physical exercises as a panacea for unproductive ageing in Nigeria. It explained the terms, physical activity and exercise, ageing and ageing process. It further discussed profitable and unprofitable ageing and recommendations were made.

Keywords: Physical Activity, Physical Exercise, Profitable Ageing and Unprofitable Ageing.

Introduction

Human body is designed for movement in all ramifications. Lack of it usually results in diseases and malfunctioning of the body organs and systems. In other words, man needs a modicum of physical activities to grow, develop and maintain a healthy status. Throughout ages, man has always pursued his means of survival through active movement experiences. This has made man's movements to be purposeful because of the diverse purposes for such physical activities. Despite the insight of man to this basic truth, it seems that engaging in structured physical activities for good life and healthy living has become difficult for most people especially the adults while even the youths are most unconcerned. The reasons for this attitude is not farfetched, they are improved standard of living, increased affluence and advances in modern technology which

have almost completely eliminated the penchant for manual labour in daily living.

The typical engagement in manual labour culture of Nigerians seems to have been limited to the rural areas. Even in the rural areas, sedentary pastimes such as watching television, playing computer games and other uses of modern day technological devices seem to be increasingly popular. In the words of Emiola (2009), the result of the new sedentary lifestyle is the increase in the hypokinetic diseases such as obesity, hypertension, stroke and related ailments which are now prevalent among the citizens especially the city dwellers. The unattended to problem appears to be not only restricted to the adults and elders as children and youths also share in the problem.

Physical Activity and Exercise Explained: Physical activity and physical exercise are related concepts. Physical

activity is any form of bodily movement that requires a modicum of energy expenditure while physical exercise is any physical activity planned and structured towards the goals of wellness and physical fitness. However, the two concepts can be used interchangeably where adequate clarification is made in respect of the usage.

Physical exercise falls into four categories namely: aerobics or endurance, strength, balance and flexibility exercises. The endurance exercise usually refers to as aerobic increases breathing and heart rates, the strength exercise increases the force by which muscles exert against resistance. The balance exercises are those used to develop and maintain stability both at work and rest. The flexibility exercises are those to improve and maintain adequate stretch and easy movements of the joints.

Ageing and Ageing Process

Ageing is a natural but complex and intra-individual process. It is a global phenomenon that is occurring faster in developing countries with its social and economic challenges. It is usually defined as a time-dependent progressive loss of individuals' physiological integrity which eventually leads to deteriorated physical functioning (Roberts et al 2017). Ageing can also be seen as a progressive decline, or a gradual deterioration of physiological functions with age, including a decrease in fecundity (Arem et. al 2015). Human ageing is associated with a wide range of physiological and social changes that not only make people more susceptible to death but limit normal functioning and render people more susceptible to number of diseases (Belikov, 2019). Ageing is a gradual and continuous process of natural changes that begin at early childhood. Ageing reflects all the changes taking place over the course of life. Accordingly to the 'World Health Organization (WHO) (2018) , it is a course of biological reality which starts at conception and ends with

death. It is a known fact that people do not become old or elderly at any specific age, but age 55 years has been traditionally designated as the beginning of old age and age 60 years was adopted as the official age for retirement in Nigeria.

With increasing age, numerous underlying physiological changes occur and the risk of chronic diseases rises by age 60 years. In the words of World Health Organization (WHO) (2021), the major burdens of disability and death arise from age-related losses in hearing, seeing and moving and non-communicable diseases such as stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes, depression and dementia. From the foregone, advancing age is the major risk factor for a number of chronic diseases in humans.

Profitable and Unprofitable Ageing

People usually wonder whether what they are experiencing as they age is normal or abnormal. As it has been stated earlier, people age somewhat differently as some changes result from internal processes that is from ageing itself. Although some of these changes are not pleasant and undesired, they are considered normal and are sometimes referred to as pure ageing. These changes occur in everyone who lives long enough and they are to be expected and are generally unavoidable. Some of these changes are benign such as grey hair, thickening and stiffening of the lens of the eye, loosing of teeth etc. All these changes can be referred to as normal ageing or what I term "Profitable Ageing". People can live healthily with these changes as they can sometimes take actions to compensate for them. e.g. seeing dentists regularly, brushing and flossing may reduce the chances of tooth loss. All the psychophysiological changes that enable wellbeing in older age can be termed profitable ageing. Profitable ageing means preserving life quality and reducing the healthy burden caused by ageing. These

are the abilities to meet basic needs, learn, grow and make decisions, build and maintain relationship and contribute to the society in one way or another.

On the other hand, going through the process of ageing in a detrimental or unbalance manner can be regarded as unhealthy which I term "Unprofitable Ageing".. This kind of ageing according to American Geriatrics Society (2021), has harmful impacts on adults physiological and metabolic health, physical capability, cognitive functions and so on. It is worth mentioning that functional decline that is part of profitable ageing sometimes seems similar to functional decline that is part of disorder. For example, forgetfulness in respect of details of an event is considered healthy ageing. But it becomes exaggerated to forgetting the entire events, it is dementia and thus unprofitable. People with dementia have difficulty attending to normal daily tasks such as driving, cooking and handling finances, including understanding the environment, knowing what year it is and where they are. Thus, dementia is considered a disorder even though it is common in late life. Profitable ageing refers to postponement of or reduction in the undesired effects of ageing.

Physical Exercise for Productive Ageing

Regular participation in exercise and accumulation of physical activity have been shown to result in improvements in physical fitness which is operationally defined as a state of wellbeing with a low risk of premature health problems and energy to participate in a variety of physical activities. People who participate in moderate to high levels of physical exercise have a lower mortality rate compared to individuals who are not physically active (Roberto et.al, 2022). Physical exercise has been found to delay the onset of chronic diseases, increase longevity and survival and improve cognitive and physical functions in the

older people. (Boutton et. al, 2018 & Zhou et al, 2018). In short a strong positive correlation between physical activity and productive aging has been established. For productive ageing, promotion of physical exercise among the younger population is very crucial as it has been confirmed that being active at the younger age is beneficial to productive ageing (Yi Hsuan Lin et al, 2020).

Regular participation in exercise by older population especially aerobic and resistance exercise plays important roles at a multisystem level, preventing severe muscle atrophy, maintaining cardio respiratory fitness, boosting metabolic activity and improving functional independence'. Regular participation in physical exercise may increase life expectancy as people who participate in moderate to high levels of physical exercise have a lower mortality rate compared to individuals who are not physically active (Gremaux et.al, 2012). Moderate levels of exercise have been correlated with preventing ageing and improving quality of life by reducing inflammatory potentials. Physical exercise participation has other multiple benefits in older age. These include improving physical and mental capacity Birgitta et.al.(2018) (maintaining muscle strength and cognitive functions, reducing anxiety and depression, improving self esteem, preventing diseases and reducing risk of coronary heart diseases, diabetes and stroke) thereby preserving life and ensuring longevity.

Conclusion

Physical exercise has a positive anti-ageing impact at the cellular level and its specific role in each ageing hallmark. In other words, individuals must practice exercise to maintain health related quality of life and functional capabilities that mitigate physiological changes and comorbidities associated with ageing. Physical exercise regime includes aerobic

exercise, muscle strengthening and endurance, flexibility and neuromotor exercises that can lead to reduction of risk of osteoporosis and osteomalacia and improvements in postural stability.

To this extent therefore, regular physical exercise/activity seems to be the only lifestyle behavior identified to date other than caloric restriction which can favourably influence a broad range of physiological systems and chronic disease risk factors and may also be associated with better mental health, social and cultural activities.

Recommendations

Exercise is as effective as some medications in preventing or managing conditions such as heart diseases, diabetes and all other psycho-physiological challenges that make ageing unproductive.

The general recommendation for older people on exercise is accumulation of 30 minutes or more of moderate intensity physical exercise on most, and preferably all days of the week.

Older people should also go on a longer warm up and cool down periods as their cardiac respiratory systems adjust to the work and adjust back to the resting state.

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