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Lack of activity adds up to health risks in later life for most Scots

Fewer than a third of adults in Scotland are doing enough physical activity to develop the muscle, balance and coordination needed for a healthy later life.

Only 31 per cent of men and 24 per cent of women met the recommended muscle strengthening guidelines of two sessions of relevant activities per week, research shows.

Among older adults, aged 65 and over, only 19 per cent of men and 12 per cent of women met similar UK physical activity guidelines for maintaining balance and coordination.

The take up is significantly lower than the benchmark for aerobic activity, which 71 per cent of men and 58 per cent of women achieved.

Building and maintaining muscle strength is associated with reducing the risk of early death and heart disease, preventing type 2 diabetes and osteoporosis.

Activities such as a gym workout, dancing, and golf improve balance and coordination and reduce the risk of falls and immobility among older adults.

Working out at the gym was the most popular activity to improve muscle strength for men – 18 per cent participated. Swimming came top for women, with 15 per cent going at least twice a week.

Golf was the most popular activity to improve balance and coordination for older men, with 11 per cent playing, while aerobics was top of the list for women, with six per cent participating.

Lead researcher Tessa Strain from the University of Edinburgh's Physical Activity for Health Research Centre said: "There is a gap in physical activity policy. Despite the known benefits muscle strengthening and balance and coordination are Scotland's forgotten guidelines.

"We would like to see more effort encouraging certain activities especially among young women and older age groups. Failure to do so could have important consequences for a country such as Scotland, with its ageing demographic."

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The results are from the article *The forgotten guidelines: cross-sectional analysis of participation in muscle strengthening and balance & co-ordination activities by adults and older adults in Scotland*, published in the journal *BMC Public Health*.

Researchers studied the results from the 2012-2014 Scottish Health Survey, which included responses from more than 10,000 adults aged 16 to 64 and almost 4000 older adults, aged 65 and over.

The research also showed the age at which participation in activities significantly decreases. Working out at the gym and jogging dips after 35, while swimming levels lower after 65 for men and 55 for women.

Playing football declines after 25 and cycling after 55 for men, while dancing reduces for women after 35.

Hill walking levels were maintained by both men and women until 65. Unusually, golf participation rose in the middle age groups for men.

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