

Agencies hope to implement senior exercise program



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Exercise is a key component in keeping senior citizens healthy, and the Oklahoma Department of Health is encouraging programs to keep the state's seniors active.

"Research shows regular exercise can reduce the pain of arthritis," said Carol McKiel, coordinator for the Cherokee County Health Coalition, during a satellite teleconference and webcast from the Alabama Public Health Training Network.

The teleconference centered on a program developed in the state of Washington called Project Enhance, a community-based health promotion for older adults.

Susan Snyder, director of Project Enhance, explained how the program worked to get measurable improvements in health and well-being of older adults.

"Enhance Fitness started in 1994 with a randomized clinical trial with the University of Washington Health Promotion Research Center, Group Health Cooperative and senior services with funding by the CDC," said Snyder. "The study was conducted over six months, with participants exercising three times a week, with one-hour sessions a day.

"The program provides older adults with exercises that are beneficial to them, and that they could also do at home.

"We found they enjoyed the group program more," said Snyder. "The exercise and the social aspects were more attractive in a group.

"The results of the six month study found that people who completed the program experienced fewer depressive symptoms and physical pain, and exhibited better mental health.

Enhance Fitness developed in a group exercise class, with exercises that increase strength, flexibility, balance and aerobic capacity. The one-hour classes, led by certified fitness instructors trained in Enhance Fitness protocols, run three times per week.

"All the exercises we know are beneficial to older adults," said Snyder. "There are different intensities for groups that have been going longer and based on the level that seniors can maintain."

The program can be tailored to specific chronic diseases, like arthritis, and covers multiple forms of exercise, including cardiovascular conditioning, resistance and strength training, flexibility training, and balance and coordination.

Fitness instructors routinely test members of the class, to see how they are progressing.

"It also provides for ongoing research," said Snyder. "They do a base-level assessment when they start the class, and see how much they improve from there."

During the course of the program, a group of seniors was able to significantly improve arm strength, balance and coordination.

The program has already been implemented in several states across the country, including Maine, Michigan and Texas.

To sign up, a group has to have a suitable facility, equipment, instructor, licensing, training and monitoring.

According to Snyder, the ideal facility would have wooden floors with air space underneath; a room temperature of 68-72 degrees; an area that does not echo; enough space for participants to move around comfortably; and would be ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) accessible.

"About 20 to 25 people in a class is about the right size," said Snyder. "More than that, and you have too many in the class."

Instructors have to be trained by Enhance Fitness, with training costing \$1,000, plus \$3,000 to get the facility licensed.

Following the presentation, McKiel said she was interested in looking into implementing a senior fitness program, and asked a representative of Go Ye Village to help gauge local interest.