

Physical Activity Suggestions for the frail elderly, those with dementia and for high care facilities



Soft bright balls and balloons:

***Aims:** exercise, enhancing concentration and hand-eye coordination, social interaction, opportunities for decision making, sensory stimulation, enjoyment, teamwork skills.*

***Resources:** soft balls of various size, colour and material, balloons, soft background music.*

***Participants:** group, individuals, suitable for all levels with planning.*

***Setting:** seated in a large circle, close enough to pass the ball/balloon in various ways, plenty of light, away from noise and distraction, CD player if desired, exercise away from potential breakages or injury to other people.*

Suggestions:

Great for spontaneous fun and especially if there are birthday balloons already hanging around, residents will enjoy the activity if you join in with them! Ball games such as balloon tennis in a group, or gentle massaging of a soft, tactile ball are great exercise just before meal times and can help wake people to their meals. This visual, tactile and physical stimulation can enhance appetite, create social confidence and assist with cognitive function.

Exercise with balls and balloons can sometimes be more successful when seemingly unplanned and spur-of-the-moment with your residents. Balloons have the advantage of being lightweight and slower in motion. Many residents with dementia, frailty or low-level function have found confidence in taking part in the gentleness of balloon exercise. Large balloons are easily purchased from Woolworths or toy stores, and they are re-usable.

We recommend using a bright colour such as red, green or orange. Soft, coloured balls and tactile rubber balls (eg with pimples, tentacles, lighting up) can be purchased from discount variety stores, Socrates, National Geographic or Big W.

Our exercise program called “**Ball and touch**” is designed to be inclusive for most abilities in a high care facility. Simple throwing and catching of the ball to the leader (you) or passing or kicking the ball to each other can be successful. Often those participating will invent ways of using and passing the ball themselves, so we always encourage decision-making and spontaneity.

The “**touch**” part of the activity is about giving soft, tactile medium sized balls to residents who are unable to participate in the group activity, but who may be able to interact with a ball themselves for pleasure, interest and hand exercise. We have often seen surprising results with residents massaging the ball, cupping it in their hands, squeezing and watching as the ball lights up etc. If you blend your group ball activity with individual clients interacting with their own smaller balls, you create opportunities for inclusion for everyone. Some residents with dementia have successfully joined in with the group session after a while, and so the possibilities are endless.

Indoor and outdoor suggestions for physical activities with your group:



Outdoor: Garden walks, garden visits (for those in wheelchairs/princess chairs) and simple gardening activities such as watering plants, picking flowers, turning soil with spade and throwing seed for birds. Seated exercise in the garden, including breathing in the fresh air is beneficial when the climate is appropriate. Tai Chi, Meditation, movement to music, simple stretching etc.

Chairobics: Create your own seated exercises according to your group’s abilities. This can include breathing exercises, stretching, clapping, stamping feet, moving shoulders, ankles and wrists in circular movements. Many participants have responded well to exercise to marching music (such as brass band marches). Consult with your physio/physio assistant for suggestions or work together on an exercise plan that can be implemented daily with a suitable staff member (training from appropriate qualified physiotherapist may be necessary first).

Useful resources: University of Kentucky pdf factsheet, exercises for the elderly: www.ca.uky.edu/fcs/FACTSHTS/HEEL-LR-928.pdf (allow a few moments for this page to appear)

Cheerleaders: (seated) – created your own cheerleader squad of females and practice simple routines of movement to music with pom poms. The aim is to perform at key sporting events such as football finals and matches, or other events of interest. This could also extend to birthdays and special parties. Alternative options to pom poms can be Japanese fans, streamers or parasols. Your group can choose favourite music and props, and create their own chant song unique to your home.

Chant eg: "Down the field, Down the field, Over the line, Touch down, boys, One more time!" (repeat 3 x's): www.cheerleading.about.com/od/cheerschantsyells/a/chants.htm

Music Workshop: playing instruments and accompanying music, singalongs and movement gestures to songs can also provide quality exercise. Gestures can include simple movement description to song lyrics eg: "roll out the barrel": motion rolling the barrel with arms and hands, "the gang's all here": point to each other and then clap three times. Create your own simple choreography to a backing CD, consulting your participants for their ideas.

Music Workshops can assist with cognitive function and fine motor skills, as well as the deeper breathing that singing creates. Subscribe to our bi-monthly e-newsletter for tips on music programs, with our regular [Music Corner](#) column. Examples of exercise through music can include: percussion workshops, clapping rhythms and playing lightweight percussion along with singing groups, church services, playing to CD music, and creative expression groups. Singing exercises promote deeper breathing and are beneficial to posture. "do-re-mi" and simple familiar songs, as well as singing back melody creations that you make up, are both interesting and team building.



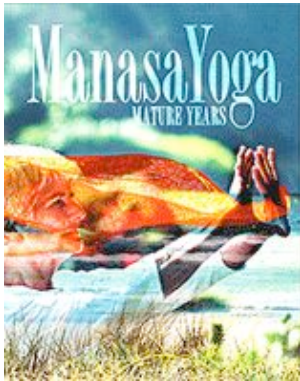
The Buddy Program: This activity encourages residents to visit each other in their rooms, especially those that are isolated. The aim is to visit, chat and provide social company for each other, as well as the benefit of the physical action of walking around your facility with a staff member or other residents. This activity is usually with accompaniment from a staff member.

The Parachute Game: this is a great social and physical activity and relies heavily on team effort. Large coloured hand held parachute can be purchased from Wisdom Activities. The aim is for each person to hold up their part of the parachute and a ball is placed on top, which has to be passed to another person by rolling across the parachute. www.wisdomactivities.com.au



Laughter Club: starts with deeper breathing exercises, then moving slowly into laughing. Try different types of laughs, such as giggling and belly laughs, just keep going and your group will follow. You can also incorporate some clapping into your laughter routine. NB: laughter club requires confidence and abandoning feelings of self consciousness. We

recommend a private room away from distractions or people watching you, and trial a weekly group, so that your participants quickly get used to the familiar routine and become more confident as each week passes. Laughter has many benefits, including increasing oxygen intake, boosting the immune system and it can be a natural pain relief. Useful websites: www.lets laugh.com.au
www.laughterstrategies.com



Seated Yoga has many benefits and is suitable for most levels of ability. **Yoga for the Mature Years DVD** - Manasa Yoga for the Mature Years is a specifically designed program of gentle yoga exercise and deep breathing for the aged. Suitable for residents of any ability including dementia, all postures are performed from a sitting position. Some of the benefits of yoga can include: increasing circulation through the body; strengthening joints, ligaments and tendons; toning the muscles; improving balance, coordination and posture.

Cost of the Yoga DVD is \$45 and a sample can be viewed on our [resource webpage](#).

Conclusions:

There are many opportunities for exercise and to optimise health and wellbeing for residents living in aged care, or attending day care centres. We hope these ideas have sparked your imagination and we are sure that you may be able to create some new ones as well.

**** Care and risk assessment planning must be taken into consideration with all activities. Please ensure residents' wellbeing, safety and the appropriateness of activities before trying any of our suggestions. Consultation with the appropriate qualified staff such as Physiotherapist and Occupational Therapist must be considered first. If running your own activity programs, remember to make repeat reminders to participants to move and breathe within a range of movement that is comfortable to them and stop if experiencing any pain or discomfort. Refreshments for re-hydration at the end of your program is fully recommended. ****