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Module 5

**How to encourage the elderly to make positive changes and
stay active**

E-Seniors, France

Authors: Solène Laborie, Alicia Guibout, Anaïs Fernandez

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Contents

Introduction	3
Practical, everyday actions to encourage the elderly to make positive changes	4
Tips for cultivating positive routines and habits in everyday life	7
Activities and exercises for both the elderly and caregivers	10
Motivational techniques to stay active and networking practices with the family and/or the community of the elderly	13
Practical/Further educational material: tools & resources for continuous active ageing	15
References	16



Introduction

This fifth module presents practical aspects to encourage older persons and caregivers to make positive changes and stay active in order to enhance their quality of life and overall well-being. As we age, maintaining physical and mental health becomes increasingly important, and small, manageable changes can lead to significant benefits. By fostering a supportive environment, promoting social engagement, and providing tailored activities that cater to their interests and abilities, older adults will be able to embrace a more active lifestyle. This not only helps them stay physically fit but also boosts their confidence and social connections, ultimately leading to a happier, healthier life.

Objectives

1. Enhance adult educators and caregivers with the knowledge and skills necessary to understand the unique needs of older adults, including physical, emotional, and cognitive aspects of aging;
2. Promote physical activity programs tailored to the abilities and interests of elderly individuals, encouraging regular participation;
3. Foster social interaction and community engagement, helping to reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness among older adults;
4. Encourage lifelong learning by offering educational activities that stimulate mental engagement and personal growth.
5. Support healthy lifestyle choices by providing resources and guidance on nutrition, wellness, and healthy habits, empowering older adults to make informed choices about their health.
6. Assist elderly individuals in setting realistic and achievable personal goals related to their health and activity levels, fostering a sense of accomplishment and motivation.



1. Practical, everyday actions to encourage the elderly to make positive changes

Practical, everyday actions to encourage the elderly to make positive changes often revolve around fostering autonomy, emotional well-being, and a sense of purpose. For many older adults, positive change comes from small, consistent adjustments to lifestyle, daily routines, and social connections. Encouragement should be centered on empowerment rather than imposing changes, as this enables the elderly to feel in control of their own decisions. Below are some theoretical considerations for these everyday actions:



1. Physical Activity and Health

Encouraging regular movement is one of the most impactful ways to foster positive changes. Physical exercise doesn't need to be strenuous; walking, light stretching, or chair exercises can improve mobility, cardiovascular health, and mental well-being. In theory, small, achievable goals, such as walking for 10 minutes a day, can build confidence and establish a habit that leads to larger, long-term health improvements. These activities also help combat common issues associated with aging, such as osteoporosis and joint stiffness, and reduce the likelihood of social isolation by encouraging group exercises or walking clubs.



2. Social Engagement

Social isolation is a significant challenge for many elderly individuals, leading to feelings of loneliness and depression. Theoretical models suggest that maintaining social interactions and engagement with the community is vital for sustaining life satisfaction. Small actions, like encouraging visits with friends, participation in social clubs, or even simple daily phone calls with loved ones, can have a profound positive impact on their mental health. Ensuring that seniors have access to communication technologies, such as phones or video-calling applications, can empower them to maintain these social connections independently.

3. Mental Stimulation and Lifelong Learning

Keeping the brain engaged through mental stimulation can delay the onset of cognitive decline. Simple, everyday activities such as puzzles, reading, or learning new skills can support cognitive health. Introducing daily routines that include brain-stimulating tasks, such as crosswords, card games, or learning through online platforms, can help maintain mental agility and provide a sense of achievement.

4. Nutrition and Healthy Eating

In theory, diet and nutrition play a crucial role in promoting longevity and quality of life. Educating the elderly about balanced eating and guiding them to make small, manageable adjustments in their diet can lead to significant long-term health improvements. Encouraging the inclusion of more fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins, while reducing processed foods, can enhance their physical well-being. Practical actions, like helping them plan meals, involving them in grocery shopping, or cooking together, not only improve nutrition but also foster independence and a sense of contribution to their own health.

5. Emotional Support and Mindfulness

Emotional well-being is crucial for positive aging. Encouraging the elderly to engage in mindfulness practices, such as gratitude journaling or relaxation techniques can help them maintain emotional stability and mental clarity. Simple actions like offering praise, expressing appreciation, or facilitating conversations about past experiences can provide emotional support and strengthen their sense of purpose and accomplishment.



6. Encouraging Independence and Personal Choice

Maintaining independence is central to the well-being of elderly individuals. Encouraging autonomy in decision-making, whether it's choosing their daily activities, what to eat, or how to spend their time, can empower them and promote a positive outlook on life. Also, recognizing the elderly' preferences, strengths, and values ensures that interventions are tailored to their specific needs. Rather than dictating changes, offering choices fosters a sense of agency and respect, which are crucial in motivating long-term positive behaviors.

7. Technology Use and Adaptation

Technology can enhance the lives of older adults by providing access to information, social networks, and tools for health management. Encouraging the elderly to use simple technologies, such as tablets, apps for medication reminders, or social media for connecting with family, can improve their quality of life. Maintaining familiar routines and adapting them with the help of technology can help older adults stay engaged in activities they find meaningful. Teaching them how to use these tools, with patience and step-by-step instructions, can build confidence and open up new avenues for independence.

8. Small Daily Routines

Helping elderly individuals establish small, positive daily routines can create a foundation for long-term well-being. Whether it's taking a walk after breakfast, dedicating time to read or engage in hobbies, or having regular meals at consistent times, small steps can snowball into more substantial positive changes over time. Encouragement should focus on sustainability—building routines that can be easily integrated into their lifestyle.

In summary, positive changes for elderly individuals come through practical, small, and everyday actions that promote their physical, social, mental, and emotional well-being. Empowering them to take ownership of their health, relationships, and daily routines fosters resilience and promotes a higher quality of life.



Encouraging positive changes in seniors also requires recognizing the unique challenges they face and finding ways to gently overcome them. For example, promoting regular physical activity can be difficult due to mobility issues, fear of injury, or lack of motivation. To address this, it's helpful to adapt exercises to their abilities, focusing on low-impact activities or incorporating movement into daily routines, while emphasizing the social benefits of exercise. In terms of healthy eating, seniors may be set in their ways, experience appetite loss, or struggle with meal preparation. Introducing small dietary changes, offering easier meal options, and involving family in mealtime can help make adjustments more manageable. Social isolation is common among the elderly, but technology, community programs, and hobbies can be powerful tools to encourage interaction, although some may need extra support to navigate technology or overcome anxiety about socializing. Cognitive engagement is another area where challenges like memory issues or frustration with new tasks may arise, but gentle guidance, games, and routine mental stimulation can foster continued mental activity. Lastly, encouraging autonomy in seniors, even if they've grown reliant on caregivers, is vital. By promoting manageable tasks that preserve independence and allowing them to make choices, seniors can feel empowered rather than dependent.

2. Tips for cultivating positive routines and habits in everyday life

The process of cultivating positive routines and habits for seniors in their everyday life can be viewed through a number of psychological and behavioral theories, which emphasize the importance of gradual change, consistency, and motivation. Positive habits form the foundation for long-term well-being, productivity, and personal fulfillment, but establishing these habits requires understanding the underlying mechanisms that drive human behavior.



1. Start Small: The Role of Micro-Habits

Habits form through repetition and consistent reinforcement of small actions over time. Starting with micro-habits—small, easily achievable tasks—can help reduce the sense of overwhelm that often accompanies trying to implement large-scale changes. For example, committing to a 5-minute daily walk is more manageable than aiming for an hour-long exercise session from the outset. As these small tasks are repeated, they become automatic, gradually expanding into more significant behavioral changes. The key is to create attainable goals that can be built upon as motivation and confidence grow.

2. Consistency: The Power of Routine

Regular routines are powerful because they create predictable patterns that the brain can latch onto. By associating a new habit with an existing one, like drinking a glass of water after brushing teeth, the elderly can utilize behavioral cues to trigger desired actions. Over time, these routines become ingrained, making it easier to maintain the behavior without requiring constant conscious effort. Repetition is crucial—consistent performance of a behavior at the same time each day helps reinforce the neural pathways that drive automaticity.



3. Intrinsic Motivation: Aligning Habits with Values

Intrinsic motivation in seniors involves connecting new habits with their personal values and interests. When activities align with what matters most to them—whether it's maintaining independence, staying connected with family, or contributing to their community—they are more likely to adopt and sustain positive behaviors. By focusing on these meaningful goals, seniors feel a deeper sense of purpose and are motivated from within to continue making healthy choices. Encouraging them to pursue hobbies, social connections, or routines that reflect their values helps foster long-term engagement and satisfaction.

4. Self-Efficacy: Building Confidence Through Success

Building self-efficacy in seniors is about fostering confidence through small, achievable successes. By setting realistic goals and celebrating each accomplishment, seniors can gradually build belief in their ability to manage tasks independently. Whether it's mastering a new skill, completing a physical activity, or sticking to a routine, these victories reinforce a positive mindset. Encouragement from caregivers and loved ones plays a key role in boosting their confidence. As seniors experience success, they become more motivated to take on new challenges, strengthening their sense of autonomy and resilience.

5. Behavioral Triggers and Cues

Environmental or situational cues can remind individuals to perform their desired behavior, whether it is setting a timer to stretch in the middle of watching a movie or placing a book on the nightstand to encourage reading before bed. Reinforcement, in the form of immediate rewards (such as feeling refreshed after a walk), helps to solidify the habit, creating a feedback loop that encourages repetition.

6. Overcoming Barriers: Addressing Cognitive and Emotional Blocks

Overcoming cognitive and emotional barriers in seniors requires understanding and patience. Cognitive decline, such as memory issues, can lead to frustration or resistance when trying new activities or skills. Breaking tasks into simple,



manageable steps and offering consistent encouragement can help alleviate these challenges. Emotionally, feelings of isolation, anxiety, or depression may reduce motivation to engage socially or mentally. Creating a supportive, routine environment where seniors feel safe to express their concerns, along with introducing small, enjoyable activities, can slowly rebuild confidence and emotional well-being, helping them stay more engaged and active.

7. Tracking Progress and Self-Monitoring

Tracking progress and encouraging self-monitoring can be a powerful way for seniors to stay motivated and engaged in making positive changes. Simple tools, like calendars or journals, can help them record daily activities, track exercise, or note health improvements. This gives them a tangible way to see their progress over time. Additionally, using reminders for medication, meals, or social activities can foster a sense of accomplishment and routine. Celebrating small successes along the way can boost their confidence, reinforcing the benefits of maintaining healthy habits and making it easier to continue these efforts independently.

3. Activities and exercises for both the elderly and caregivers

As we grow older, it becomes vital to maintain an active lifestyle to enhance our overall well-being. Regular exercise is key for seniors, as it offers a multitude of benefits, from physical strength to improved mental health. However, establishing and sticking to a routine can be challenging for many older adults. This is where caregivers play a crucial role, bridging the gap between the need for physical activity and its successful integration into daily life. Their support ensures that seniors can enjoy the positive impact of staying active and healthy.

The Benefits of Physical Activity for Seniors

Exercise is vital for seniors, as it goes beyond merely maintaining physical health — it serves as a cornerstone for enhancing their overall quality of life.

Engaging in regular physical activity offers numerous benefits, such as :

- managing weight,



- reducing the risk of chronic diseases,
- improving mobility and balance,
- and even boosting mood and mental function.

Staying active plays a significant role in increasing seniors' chances of living independently by fostering self-reliance and reducing the risk of falls—an all too common concern that can result in serious injuries among the elderly.

Exercise can also help:

- manage chronic pain,
- reduce stress and anxiety,
- and improve sleep quality.

Participating in physical activities can provide opportunities for social interaction and connection, which is essential for combating feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Maintaining a routine, however, often requires the motivation and encouragement that caregivers can provide. They can design safe and enjoyable exercise programs, tailored to the individual needs and capabilities of each senior. By setting achievable goals, caregivers can help older adults feel successful and motivated to continue with their routines. Moreover, the companionship of a caregiver during these activities can make exercising a more enjoyable and less daunting task, fostering a continuous, positive attitude towards physical health and well-being.

Establishing an Exercise Routine for Seniors

To successfully integrate an exercise routine into a senior's lifestyle, it is critical to consider both the type and intensity of the activity to ensure it aligns with their physical capabilities. Low-impact exercises, such as walking, swimming, or yoga, can be excellent starting points for building endurance and flexibility without overstressing the body. The use of resistance bands or light weights can also contribute to maintaining and improving muscle mass, which is crucial for mobility and overall health.

Caregivers and health professionals should collaborate to create a comprehensive plan that includes a variety of activities to keep seniors engaged and prevent



monotony. Regular evaluation and adaptation of the routine are important to match the changing physical abilities of the individual and to continue to provide the appropriate level of challenge. It's essential for seniors to feel a sense of progress and accomplishment, which in turn will further encourage the maintenance of an active lifestyle.

Tailoring Activities to Individual Needs

The key to a successful exercise regimen for seniors lies in personalization. Activities should be tailored to the individual's current fitness level, medical conditions, and personal preferences. This approach ensures that exercise is not only safe but also enjoyable, increasing the likelihood of consistency. Walking, water aerobics, gentle yoga, and tai chi are excellent low-impact options that can be adjusted to fit a wide range of physical capabilities. Additionally, incorporating functional exercises that mimic daily tasks, such as squats or reaching exercises, can help improve balance and strength for everyday activities.

Each individual's exercise goal is as unique as they are. Some may aim to improve cardiovascular health, while others may focus on increasing muscle strength. Whatever the goal may be, it's important for caregivers and health professionals to work together to identify specific areas of improvement and tailor exercises accordingly. This not only ensures better results but also reduces the risk of injury due to overexertion or improper form.

Most importantly the elderly should be having fun while exercising. Find activities that they enjoy and make them a part of their daily routine. This could be dancing, gardening, or simply taking a walk in nature. Staying physically active doesn't have to feel like a chore, it can be something seniors look forward to each day.

The Caregiver's Role in Promoting Exercise

Caregivers play a vital role in encouraging and facilitating regular exercise. This can involve:

- **Creating a Routine:** Establishing a regular schedule for physical activity can help turn exercise into a habit. Caregivers can assist in setting realistic goals and gradually increasing the duration and intensity of activities as appropriate.



- **Ensuring Safety:** Supervising exercise sessions to ensure that movements are performed correctly can prevent injuries. Caregivers can also be instrumental in recognizing when an activity may be too strenuous and adjustments are needed.
- **Offering Support and Encouragement:** Motivation from caregivers can be a powerful incentive for seniors to stay active. Celebrating milestones, no matter how small, can boost morale and encourage persistence.
- **Incorporating Social Interaction:** Whenever possible, involving peers in exercise activities can enhance the experience, making it more socially engaging and less of a chore. Group classes or walking clubs are great options for fostering community and camaraderie among seniors.

4. Motivational techniques to stay active and networking practices with the family and/or the community of the elderly

In order to encourage older persons to stay active and connected with their relatives and engaged in the community, there are some motivational techniques to take into account:





1. Knowing the benefits of being active.

This advice sounds simple but can be extremely effective. There are many benefits to physical and social activities for seniors and people of all ages. Here are just a few :

- Having social connections
- Developing positive emotions & cognitive vitality
- Reinforcing physical strength, mobility, and increased independence

The participation in social and physical activities impacts also the transition to senior living. Here are a few examples of activities:

- 1) **Walk and talk:** joining a walking group is a great way to stay both physically and socially active and allows seniors to get to know their neighbours, to explore their local community and to meet new people.
- 2) **Join a book club:** Starting or joining a book club makes it easy to meet new people with similar values and interests.
- 3) **Find a sports partner or join a class** will make exercise more enjoyable. There are many organisations that offer activity classes specifically for older people, such as water aerobics, Pilates, yoga or tai chi.
- 4) **Learn something new:** retirement can be the perfect time to learn something new, such as an instrument, a language or a creative activity and to create new social connections.
- 5) **Develop cognitive & mental stimulation** with puzzles or memory training to improve cognitive skills, memory, concentration and problem-solving.
- 6) **Plan trips** to remain active, to develop open-mindedness and create new contacts.

2. Make exercise fun

Some people like to walk on a treadmill at the gym. Others find that type of activity boring. The key to sticking with exercise is to make it interesting and enjoyable. It could be interesting to mix four types of exercise — endurance, strength, balance, and flexibility. With less than one quarter engaging in regular physical activity, older adults are the least physically active of any age group. To change this statistic, it is important to make activities and exercise fun.



3. Encourage manageable goals and celebrate small accomplishments

With small, achievable goals, it's easier to cultivate feelings of confidence, a sense of purpose, and pride in accomplishment. If the activity is a success, seniors will be able to think bigger and build upon their success and gradually increase intensity.

Also, positive reinforcement helps create motivation and confidence. Positive comments help strengthen people's self-efficacy. Some simple ways to celebrate accomplishments are: giving a high five, giving a hug or a pat on the back, giving a thumbs up, clapping and cheering.

5. Practical/Further educational material: tools and resources for continuous active ageing

In the toolkit dedicated to Positive Ageing realized in the framework of WP2, many activities, educational programs, tools and videos are easily available in order to foster active ageing and wellbeing.

Exercises and activities presented through infographics are also accessible on the Internet (see example below).



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