



GETTING OLDER, STAYING ACTIVE: PROMOTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TO OLDER ADULTS

This is a summary of research carried out by the Institute of Public Health, as part of the Generating Active Lives in Older People (GALOP) research project. Access the full research [here](#).

Official guidelines in Ireland and Northern Ireland recommend per week 150 minutes of moderate activity, 75 minutes of vigorous activity or an equivalent combination of both for older adults (65+ years). However, data shows that more than half of older adults in Ireland and Northern Ireland were not getting enough physical activity before the Covid-19 pandemic took hold, with more recent evidence pointing to falling physical activity levels during the pandemic.



About the GALOP study

Healthcare professionals have a key role in promoting physical activity. The GALOP study set out to develop our understanding of the promotion of physical activity to older adults by healthcare professionals in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The study involved four phases:

- a systematic review of evidence
- a review of current policy and guidelines
- a cross sectional survey of healthcare practitioners in Ireland and Northern Ireland
- a series of interviews with healthcare professionals who work with older adults.

The [systematic review](#), published in 2020, concluded that physically active older adults experience healthier ageing, better quality of life, improved cognitive function and are at lower risk of developing illnesses, such as breast and prostate cancer, Alzheimer's disease and depression, than those who are not physically active.

The policy review, conducted as part of the GALOP study, found that physical inactivity is one of the most important public health challenges facing older adults and requires greater emphasis on improving health and wellbeing through prevention as well as treatment.

“ Exercise in the prevention of coronary heart disease:
today's best buy in public health”

*Professor Jeremy Morris, CBE
Epidemiologist, 1910 - 2009*



The GALOP survey

This summary focusses on the third phase of the GALOP study which surveyed healthcare professionals about their knowledge, decision-making and routine practice of promoting physical activity to older adults. A cross-sectional survey was conducted between August and October 2020 with practicing healthcare professionals in general practice, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and nursing in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

What did this survey find?

The findings are based on 347 responses and found that awareness of national physical activity guidelines varied considerably among healthcare professionals.

The majority of respondents agreed that discussing physical activity was part of their role, however most indicated that they had not received suitable training to initiate discussions with patients.

When asked about promoting physical activity to older adults, this is what a cross-sectional survey of healthcare professionals found:



On national guidelines promoting physical activity:

- 42.7% said they were aware of national guidelines for physical activity for the general population.
- 48.7% reported that they 'never' formally assess whether a patient is active or inactive as part of routine practice.



On promoting physical activity:

- 70.3% agreed that discussing physical activity is their job.
- 30.5% indicated they had a clear plan on how to initiate discussions about physical activity in routine practice with older adults.



On training and support:

- 30.0% agreed they had received suitable training to initiate conversations with patients about physical activity.
- 47.6% said they were aware of resources to further develop their knowledge and practice in this area.

How do these findings relate to public health?

Promoting physical activity has the potential to improve health and prevent illness, in particular for older adults, to help stay healthier for longer and enjoy a better quality of life.

This study identifies the need for appropriate education, training, and access to resources to support healthcare professionals to promote physical activity in routine practice to older adults.

Further information

