

Protecting older people from COVID-19 must not come at the expense of their health and wellbeing

May 15 2020



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

The British Geriatrics Society has warned that the lockdown and social distancing measures, meant to protect vulnerable older people from COVID-19, have led to dangerously low levels of physical activity. If not addressed as a matter of urgency this will prove to be detrimental to their physical and mental health. For many older people, reduced levels of fitness will likely result in a loss of independence and an increased need for medical treatment in future.

Older people, and those with long-term conditions, have been advised by the Government to 'shield' themselves during the pandemic and not leave their homes for any reason. While these measures have been beneficial in protecting older people from the virus, many have found it difficult to keep active². This is a growing problem, both for those who are recovering from COVID-19 and those who are shielding at home.

Research has shown that lower levels of physical activity in the older population can lead to a number of health complications including an increased risk of falls and fractures³, a faster resting heart rate, a loss of muscle mass and a tendency to develop blood clots.

Developing serious health problems has a negative impact on all areas of an older person's life including mental health⁴ and day-to-day functioning, as well as limiting freedom and quality of life. For older people, reduced levels of fitness will increase their health and care needs, putting further pressure on already-stretched public services.

While younger people are happy to turn to apps, YouTube or other online sources to motivate them to keep fit, older people, who may not have access to digital technology or be comfortable using it, have largely

been forgotten. The British Geriatrics Society is calling for the Government to recognise the importance of this issue and encourage everyone to keep active, particularly those [vulnerable groups](#) whose circumstances make it harder for them to take exercise. The BGS is therefore recommending that a nation-wide regular exercise program is broadcast on terrestrial daytime television and on the radio. It is vital that older people are encouraged to exercise safely in their homes and enjoy the benefits this brings to their health and well-being.

Dr. Celia Gregson of the British Geriatrics Society, commented:

"As a geriatrician and an epidemiologist, I am increasingly concerned about our older population, isolated in their homes, becoming increasingly 'deconditioned' from inactivity. Deconditioning is more than just becoming 'out of shape,' it puts people at risk of serious accidents and illnesses and is often associated with a deterioration in [mental health](#) . At this time of massive behavior change, now is the time to help older people 'stay home and keep active' to improve their physical and mental wellbeing."

Provided by British Geriatrics Society

Citation: Protecting older people from COVID-19 must not come at the expense of their health and wellbeing (2020, May 15) retrieved 30 March 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-05-older-people-covid-expense-health.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--