

Affordable and accessible community-based exercise sessions crucial to improving strength, balance, confidence and independence in older people in Oxfordshire

Falls are not a normal part of ageing, and they can be prevented. Specific community-based exercise sessions can help to improve strength and balance which can help to prevent falls. In Oxfordshire there are 121,000 people over 65 and 17,000 aged over 85. Between 2016 and 2017 11 % of all ambulance callouts in Oxfordshire were for a fall and there were 2,771 hip fractures recorded (hip fractures alone cost the NHS around £1 billion per year in the UK). ¹

The Centre for Ageing Better, an independent charitable foundation that campaigns for a society where everyone enjoys a good later life, have published a report that discusses the importance of community based strength & balance programmes to reduce demands on A&E departments as well as social care:

“Strength and balance activity can mitigate these risks and can lower the chance of suffering a fall, improve energy levels, mood and sleeping patterns and reduce the risk of early death.

The report shows that, for adults with declining mobility and those experiencing a loss of muscle and bone strength or balance, there can be a corresponding decline in their ability to manage everyday activities like eating, bathing and getting dressed on their own.

The report recommends that NHS and local authorities support evidence-based programmes, making sure that the most effective approaches to improving strength and balance are accessible and affordable for everyone.”

Oxfordshire health and social services and the charity sector are working together for a long-term plan of prevention – preventing falls before they happen. Muscle weakness and poor balance are the two most common modifiable risk factors for falls. There is a magic bullet that can significantly contribute to reducing the number of falls: targeted specific exercise that is done regularly.

People who are older, worried about their balance, have had a fracture or fall may be particularly apprehensive about exercise. This is why it is important that sessions are taught by a qualified instructor.

Generation Games, Age UK Oxfordshire’s physical activity service, have been running such Strength & Balance falls prevention classes for two years now, and the number of classes across the county has grown rapidly in that time. At present, there are 39 such classes that are attended by ca. 450 people in the county every week.

¹ <https://nhfd.co.uk/files/2017ReportFiles/NHFD-AnnualReport2017.pdf>

What is different, and important to note, about these classes is that they are held in community venues such as village halls and community centres – not medical venues – and that they are ongoing.

GPs and healthcare professionals can refer patients to these sessions, enabling a person to take part in 6 weeks for free and they are encouraged to attend regularly thereafter, as well as continue to do the exercises at home twice a week.

One class participants said: *'I am very mobile and don't need to have a stick to help me but I do lack confidence after a nasty fall and this class helps enormously'*

"I'm recovering from a pelvic fracture - I feel much improved from attending'.

Full report

<https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/publications/raising-bar-strength-balance>

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Strength and Balance Classes

For information on Age UK Oxfordshire's Strength & balance classes please contact Anna McKay via annamckay@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk or 01235 849403

About Age UK Oxfordshire

Age UK Oxfordshire is an independent local charity dedicated to giving older people in Oxfordshire comfort, support and opportunities and enabling them to love later life. We provide free local information, advice and support; commercial products and services; and research and campaign on the issues that matter to people in later life. We work with our national partner, Age UK, and our local Age UK partners in England. Our work focuses on five key areas: money matters, health and wellbeing, home and care, work and training and leisure and lifestyle. You can find further information on all our services and volunteering opportunities by telephoning 0345 450 1276 or by visiting our website: www.ageuk.org.uk/oxfordshire. Age UK Oxfordshire is a charitable company limited by guarantee (registered charity number 1091529 and company number 4328143).

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