Encouraging higher levels of physical activity amongst people with LTCs

Research conducted on behalf of the Richmond Group
October 2016
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Methodology
Overview of methodology

- Literature review
- 8 x depth interviews
  - 6 with people with multiple LTCs who never / rarely exercise
  - 2 with people who are close to someone with multiple LTCs
- Message development workshop
  - Incorporating emerging findings from the depths
- 5 x focus groups
  - 4 x groups with people with LTCs who never / rarely exercise
  - 1 x group with people close to someone with an LTC
- Interim findings
- Online poll
  - Poll with 323 respondents
  - Average survey length: 14 minutes
- Analysis and reporting
Definition of “physical activity”:

Any activity that gets you up and moving. This might include things like walking to the shops, gardening or doing the housework, as well as things like riding a bike, going for a swim, or playing football.
Who we spoke to

Qualitative sample:
- The primary audience for this research was extremely inactive people with multiple LTCs, i.e. those who engage in physical activity once a week or less
- The qualitative sample was recruited to reflect this and participants were extremely inactive

Quantitative sample:
- Those with multiple LTCs who are more active were a secondary audience
- Our quantitative sample was therefore structured to include some more active respondents
  - 38% do 10 minutes or more of physical activity every day

“I would say if I can do half an hour of vacuuming or putting the bins out then that would be a maximum for me per day.”
- Multiple LTCs, Male, Depth interview

“I’ve not been out of the house for 4 months. I can’t walk very far… Mainly, any exercise to me is pottering about, emptying the waste bins, tidying up in general. That’s all I can do.”
- Multiple LTCs, Female, Depth Interview
Background attitudes
A desire amongst those with LTCs to be more active indicates a messaging opportunity.

Q. Which of the following best describes how you feel about your levels of physical activity? Base: All with a long-term condition (n=216)

- I am happy with the amount of physical activity I do, and do not want to do more (32%)
- I am unhappy with the amount of physical activity I do, and want to do more (61%)

“When I see cyclists, I think I used to be part of that and I’m not anymore… I really feel I ought to do more exercise.”

Multiple LTCs, Male, Depth interview
Both “exercise” and “physical activity” have negative connotations, and are seen as “not for me”

What are the first 3 words or phrases that come into your head when you think of...

Exercise

Physical activity
The strongest barriers to physical activity relate to the symptoms associated with respondents’ LTCs

Barriers preventing people with LTCs from doing physical activity

- Pain before, during or after physical activity: 59%
- Feeling tired before, during or after physical activity: 40%
- Breathlessness before, during or after physical activity: 36%
- Lack of motivation: 33%
- Not knowing what types of activity are right for them / their condition: 33%
- Fear of hurting themselves: 28%
- Lack of suitable facilities: 11%
- Lack of time: 8%
- Feeling embarrassed: 8%
- Feeling unsafe in public spaces: 7%
- Cost: 7%
- Other: 7%
- None of the above: 5%

Q. The following are some barriers that might stop people with long-term conditions from doing physical activity. Please select the biggest barrier you think would be most likely to stop people with long-term conditions from doing physical activity. Base: All (n=323)

“Pain. I can’t stand up for long. I get shaky, I don’t know if that’s the back or the Parkinson’s.”

Multiple LTCs, Female, Depth interview
Survey respondents say preventing conditions from deteriorating & improved mobility are the top benefits of physical activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>% Selecting</th>
<th>% Selecting each option as one of the top 3 benefits of physical activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prevent health conditions from getting worse</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved mental health</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of achievement</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased confidence</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased strength</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce stress</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet new people</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our less active qualitative participants struggled to articulate the benefits of physical activity, beyond a general sense that it is “good for your health”

Q. The following are some benefits that people with long-term conditions might get from doing physical activity. Please select the biggest benefit that you think people with long-term conditions might get. Base: All (n=323)
Message testing
Approach to message testing

- The message development workshop produced a suite of messages to take forward for testing.

- These were tested with participants in the focus groups to understand which messages work well, which work less well, and the reasons for this.

- The messages identified as the most or least effective were then carried through to the poll for a further round of testing.
What makes a successful message?
Successful messages speak to everyone, regardless of ability or demographic

✓ Provide reassurance that anyone can do physical activity
  ✓ Without specifically singling out the very incapacitated

✓ Encourage those who may have given up

✓ Use inclusive, unintimidating language e.g. “everyone”, “active” or “mobile”

Everyone benefits from moving about more, regardless of how old they are, or what their health is like

It’s never too late to start getting active
Successful messages combine positivity with realism to sound credible

✓ Communicate the health benefits of physical activity

✓ But also recognise that some people’s ability to engage may be limited

✓ And provide reassurance that even a small amount of physical activity will bring benefits
  ✓ Setting the bar low (e.g. “just 10 minutes a day”) ensures that the very inactive are not “frightened off”

✓ And concrete suggestions for actions they could take e.g. walking to the bus stop

Even small amounts of physical activity can bring long-term benefits for your health and wellbeing

Every step counts
Small increases in activity, like walking to the bus stop, can have a big impact on your health
Successful messages speak to people’s aspirations for their own lives

- Recognise that, in addition to health, people with LTCs might have a range of reasons for wanting to be more active
  - Being able to remain independent
  - Being able to spend time with their families
- And tap into these aspirations to motivate people

- Physical activity... can keep you mobile
- Physical activity can help you stay strong and remain independent
- Physical activity can help you stay strong so you can... play with the grandkids
Why do weaker messages not work so well?
Weaker messages challenge people’s lived experiences

X Suggest benefits of physical activity that people do not experience or expect
  X That it will reduce or help manage pain
  X That it will be fun
    X It is not for most - and they do not expect it to be
  X That they will get “fit”
    X Feels unrealistic for most

X These messages therefore lack credibility

Be a natural painkiller
Regular physical activity can help manage your pain

Have fun, feel free

Get fit, make friends
Weaker messages are patronising

- Make assumptions about individuals’ conditions or symptoms
  - By referring to “your symptoms” or “your condition”

- Assume individuals lack knowledge or understanding of their own condition
  - By using phrases such as “Did you know...?”

- Imply that people with LTCs’ lives are currently unhappy or unsatisfactory
  - Or that they are in some way the “prisoners” of their conditions

- Use excessively colloquial or “matey” language
  - E.g. “grandkids”

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Physical activity is a natural painkiller

Being more active can help manage your pain

Starting a new physical activity can help you meet new people

Have fun, feel free
Weaker messages are bossy

- Tone and language instructs, rather than suggesting or encouraging
  - E.g. “Be a....” or “See what…”

- Appears to threaten negative consequences of not engaging in physical activity, rather than focusing on the benefits

  - Starting a new physical activity can help you meet new people. See what is available in your area
  - Be a natural painkiller
  - Physical activity can prevent your health from getting worse
Who is best-placed to deliver these messages?
The best spokespeople are credible and relatable

Best-placed people to talk about why people with LTCs should do physical activity

- A GP: 35%
- Someone who has multiple LTCs: 29%
- A doctor who appears on TV regularly: 9%
- A friend or relative of someone with multiple LTCs: 6%
- A nurse: 5%
- Head of a charity working to raise awareness of / help people with LTCs: 3%
- A personal trainer: 2%
- Dame Kelly Holmes: 1%
- Jeremy Clarkson: 1%
- None of the above: 3%
- Don't know: 5%

Q. Which of the following people, if any, do you think would be best to talk about why people with long-term conditions should engage in physical activity? Base: All with a long-term condition (n=216)

- “[Someone with LTCs would be good] because it is someone who is suffering as well you can relate to them.”  
  Multiple LTCs, Female, Focus Group

- “[Jeremy Clarkson] No! He’s a fat slob. He’s arrogant. He would be saying the message and another thing under his breath.”  
  Multiple LTCs, Male, Focus Group
Key insights
Key insights

1. Even the most incapacitated people we spoke to say that they want to be more physically active - indicating a valuable messaging opportunity for the Richmond Group.

2. Both exercise and physical activity are seen as “not for people like me” amongst inactive participants with multiple long-term conditions. However, whilst the broad understanding of both are similar, the negative connotations (e.g. pain) of “exercise” are more top-of-mind, whilst “physical activity” has associations with tasks such as housework and gardening.

3. The strongest barriers to physical activity are internal and relate to the symptoms experienced by those with LTCs (e.g. pain, breathlessness). However, the most commonly identified benefits (e.g. preventing conditions from deteriorating) do not address these barriers. Consequently, messages claiming to improve symptoms are dismissed.
Key insights

Successful messages have 3 key attributes:
• They speak to everybody, regardless of their demographic or current levels of activity
• They combine positivity about the benefits of physical activity with realism about what is achievable, giving them credibility
• They speak to people’s aspirations for their own lives, for example spending time with their grandchildren, or being independent

Weaker messages also have 3 key attributes:
• They challenge the lived experiences of those with LTCs
• They are interpreted as patronising (e.g. by making assumptions about individuals’ conditions or assuming that their life is in some way circumscribed)
• Their tone is bossy, with language that instructs rather than encourages
Thank you!

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