

Physiotherapy + Active Aging

Facts on how physiotherapists help Alberta seniors be healthy + stay healthy



As the population grows and ages, the number of people diagnosed with and living with age-related and chronic disease is expected to rise exponentially. In 2011, 11% or 1 in 10 Albertans were seniors age 65 years or older. By 2031, that number will double to 21.6% or 1 in 5 Albertans aged 65 or over.¹ Currently chronic and age-related disease and conditions place a significant strain on Alberta's healthcare system. That will only increase as Alberta's aging population increases. More than 50% of a person's lifetime healthcare expenditures occur after the age of 65.²

Age-related + chronic disease facts:

- Falls lead the reasons for hospitalization among Alberta seniors. Albertans over 65 represent 78% of all injury-related hospitalizations and 59% of all injury-related ER visits.² 40% of all nursing home admissions result from falls.³ National healthcare costs from senior falls are estimated at \$1 billion/year.⁴
- 90% of all seniors' hip fractures are caused by falls, 15-20% of these seniors will die from related complications.⁴
- Almost 50% of Alberta seniors report physical disabilities from illness or injury.¹ The most common problems are mobility (34.4%), agility (32.3%) and pain issues (29.2%).
- Over 4 in 5 seniors living independently suffers from a chronic health condition.⁵
- Regular activity helps prevent/slow age and chronic disease-related functional decline. It helps prevent falls, speed recovery from cardiovascular disease, stroke, osteoarthritis and osteoporosis, improve joint and musculoskeletal health and mental health.⁶⁻¹⁰
- 4 in 10 Alberta seniors report being moderately physically active. Only 33% are active enough to achieve health benefits.¹¹ 50% of Alberta seniors report being overweight/obese.¹
- For health-related benefits, physical activity guidelines recommend seniors get at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per week.^{12,13}

How physiotherapists help:

- **Prescribe safe, effective therapeutic exercise programs.** Many seniors have age and/or chronic disease-related issues limiting their physical function/activity. Physiotherapists can design specific programs/activities to address these issues and help seniors improve/optimize function and mobility and maintain independence.
- **Provide balance/coordination training to reduce risk of falls,** slow age-related balance decline and improve seniors' confidence, mobility and independence.
- **Assess adaptive equipment/mobility aid requirements** to help seniors maintain mobility/independence.
- **Treat and help patients self-manage pain and/or physical impairments/disability** from chronic and/or age-related conditions.
- **Teach specific, appropriate strengthening and aerobic exercises to reduce pain and disability** for those with arthritis and osteoporosis, and help seniors better manage their COPD, cardiovascular disease, stroke, or diabetes. Exercises must be tailored to the specific circumstances. Example, the exercise needs of a diabetic with a below knee amputation will be different than the needs of an active senior who can no longer run because of arthritis.



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