Encouraging mobility through movement to music

Moving to music is a popular leisure activity that ranges from simply tapping fingers or feet in time to music to energetic dancing. Care home staff should remember that people gain pleasure from participation, regardless of their standard of performance. Although a resident may become frailer, it is vital to encourage maximum mobility. Deterioration in physical ability leads to an increase in dependence on others for daily living activities. The saying ‘use it or loose it’ is true of people in residential care.

Benefits of movement to music
People living in a care environment can benefit from this activity in many ways:
- It is an enjoyable social activity
- It provides a safe and effective way of exercising specific muscle groups, to improve energy levels and stamina, improve suppleness, coordination and speed of movement and increase muscle strength
- Rehabilitation aims are reinforced by targeting specific problem areas, such as general weakness or postural and mobility problems
- Metabolic rate is increased, thereby reducing body fat and weight and helping to lower cholesterol
- Cardiovascular efficiency and circulation are improved
- Sleep patterns are improved, particularly if relaxation is taught and reinforced at bedtime.

Factors to first consider
The environment should be proactive and should involve residents and staff in recreational sessions. With a supportive team, individuals can play to their strengths. Other staff can help by:

- ‘Brainstorming’ ideas for the sessions
- Finding suitable music or planning movement patterns
- Moving residents into the room to be used and helping them during the session
- Being ‘on call’ for toileting – it is impossible to carry out a session when dual duties are needed.

The physical environment
A well ventilated warm room should be selected, with suitable seating that allows sufficient space for arm and leg movements. Some wheelchairs may tip when occupants lean too far forwards, so wheelchair users should be transferred into suitable seating. Alternatively, footplates can be removed and the client’s feet placed on the floor, raising the feet if necessary.

Know your resident’s capabilities and limitations
The clients’ medical problems and any ‘hidden’ conditions must be known. Risk assessments should be checked, remembering that changes can occur quickly with a resident’s medical condition.

Consider the aims of the session
Gentle exercising and stretches should be provided to maintain suppleness,
Social activity

Planning the session

The following basic points must first be considered:

1. Decide on the number of residents
2. Decide on the length of the session (20–60 minutes is recommended) and time
3. Do not let clients exercise on a full stomach, e.g. directly after lunch
4. Choose a suitable room
5. Select music with a regular beat
6. Work out the movements or exercises to specific tracks
7. Arrange for additional help if needed
8. Ensure that the equipment you need is in working order
9. Check whether or not residents are fit to participate, i.e. agree actions with their care plan
10. Ensure that loose-fitting clothing is worn and that residents’ dignity is preserved.

Warming up

The session should start with gentle ‘warm-up’ movements to loosen and stretch the muscles, using one or two tracks of the music, taking each muscle group through its maximum range of movement.

Choice of music

Music often holds special meanings, triggering memories of joy or sadness. Wenborn (2003) explains the value of music in the care home environment. Chosen music should be enjoyable and appropriate to the group. Residents can be asked which singers or songs they like. If language or memory is a problem, then the resident’s relatives or friends can be asked.

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Music in the care home environment.

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is vital to ensure that residents are doing exercises correctly and safely. Help should be provided when needed, particularly to facilitate active range of movement. Staff should be prepared to alter either the music or the movements.

**At the end of the session**

One music track of cool-down movements should be done to restore the body system to a pre-exercise level. Otherwise, the muscles may shorten, causing stiffness, cramp or pain the following day. Large movements grading down to smaller, slower movements is recommended.

A long session should be ended with 5–15 minutes of systemic relaxation, to wind down. Relaxation is also termed visualization or cognitive quieting and is used after yoga or pilates.

During relaxation, residents should be asked to sit comfortably with their hands on their laps and be encouraged to take some slow, deep breaths. Residents should be guided through systemically tensing each muscle group, then relaxing. The activity organizer can describe a restful scene, such as a quiet woodland, a trickling stream or a deserted beach. A track (or several) of gentle instrumental music can be played.

When the music finishes, the residents can stretch out their arms and then their legs, curl their spines and uncurl, and then relax. Graham (2000) outlines a systemic relaxation session.

**After the session**

Residents should be asked for feedback on the session. Further activities can be included within the residents’ weekly programme, to encourage maximum use of their abilities.

The care home may have a standard format for recording activities, but if not, short records should be kept as an aide-mémoire. The names of participants, music and type of movements used should be noted. Any adverse effects should also be noted, and any problems promptly reported to senior staff.

**Further resources**

Books on fitness for the older and frail person are available from local libraries, bookshops or via the internet. Exercises from them can be adapted to the sitting position or ‘toned down’.

Physiotherapists, local clinics and hospitals will provide guidelines on exercise for specific conditions.

**Conclusion**

Movement to music is a low-cost, enjoyable activity that can be used in many care settings. Movement to music should be light-hearted, fun, pleasurable and a social activity.

It is important to build up slowly, so activity should start with gentle, slow movements. The choice of music sets the mood for the session and may develop into a ‘sing-along’.

Movement to music is easier to carry out and more enjoyable if the main part is action-related. It becomes easier with practice; which applies both to the recipient and the provider.


Quarta C (2001) *Tai Chi in a Chair*. Fairwinds Press, Massachusetts