



# How to Help Residents Manage Chronic Illness with Exercise

It's almost impossible to imagine that you would have residents, even the most active older adults, who are free from a chronic illness. Arthritis, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure are all very common in seniors. Other conditions like dementia, Parkinson's disease, and heart disease are also regulars on health history lists for the seniors we work with.

If you want residents to exercise more, you need to make sure their exercise program is designed to support their desire to proactively manage symptoms of their chronic conditions. Here are some supports to put in place.

**1. Hire educated staff.** As an organization that provides this very service to senior living clients all over the country, we've written extensively on the topic. It's no surprise that we think outsourcing your fitness staff is a great choice. However, if your fitness center staffing style is more of a DIY approach, definitely consider these tips:

- Do a double-check on candidate credentials. There are a lot of fitness certifications these days, and not all of them are worth much. Look for NCCA-accredited certifications and those from industry gold standard organizations like the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), or the American Council on Exercise (ACE).
- Require some demonstration of skills for the job. Trust us when we say that not everyone with a degree in fitness can teach a quality group fitness class. Make them do a demo in their interview, and ask how they evaluate a resident's health history when recommending exercise.
- Confirm that the candidate understands your audience. New grads with limited field experience often can't articulate the difference between someone older than them (in their 40s, for example) and an older adult who may be in his 80s.

To read more about how to hire qualified staff, check out this blog.

**2. Provide baseline assessment services through the fitness program.** The best way to tailor an exercise program for each of your residents is to understand their starting point and their health circumstances. Adding free fitness assessments and exercise prescriptions into your menu of services is crucial if you want residents to feel confident using the equipment safely and effectively.

For more information about other must-have services in your fitness program, read this blog.

**3. Establish a connection between the fitness program and clinicians in the community.** Your fitness center staff should be working hand in hand with your therapy team and quite possibly with the social worker, director of nursing, or other staff who are in a position to understand health changes in your residents. A multidisciplinary team is a best practice that helps your staff work efficiently and effectively to the great benefit of your residents.

**To find out more about bringing NIFS staff onsite to manage your fitness center, visit our website [wellness.nifs.org](http://wellness.nifs.org) or contact Bethany Garrity at 317-274-3432 or by email.**

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