

How Health Centers Can Promote Benefits of Exercise to Diabetic Public Housing Residents and Promising Practices

Getting regular exercise can be a challenge, but there are many positive benefits, particularly for people with diabetes. Physical inactivity is associated with the development of 40 chronic diseases, including Type 2 Diabetes.¹ However, exercise can be difficult for people living in public housing because some public housing developments are in crime-ridden areas or areas that are not readily walkable.² In this blog post, we will discuss ways that diabetic patients living in public housing can exercise that are simple and convenient for them. To help these individuals gain the benefits of regular exercise, health centers can continue to promote the benefits of exercise and suggest practical ways for doing so. Listed below are some benefits of exercise for diabetic patients, in addition to ways that patients can get more active.

Why Promote Exercise for Patients Living in Public Housing?

1. Exercise improves mood and mental health³

Improved mental health can provide additional motivation to exercise. People with diabetes are 2 to 3 times more likely to have depression than people without diabetes.⁴ Over 70% of individuals receiving housing assistance or rental assistance reported that they had feelings of depression.⁵ Engaging in physical exercise releases endorphins and improves mood. Running for 15 minutes a day or walking for an hour has been found to lower the risk of major depression by over 26 percent.⁶ People with diabetes are also more likely to suffer from anxiety⁷ and people with diabetes are 20% more likely to have anxiety at some point in their life than those without diabetes.⁸



¹ [Health Benefits of Exercise](#); Cold Spring Harbor Perspectives in Medicine

² [Social Determinants of Health for Public Housing Residents: Community Violence](#); National Center for Health in Public Housing

³ [Health Benefits of Exercise](#); Cold Spring Harbor Perspectives in Medicine

⁴ [Diabetes and Mental Health](#); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

⁵ [Social Determinants of Health for Public Housing Residents: Community Violence](#); National Center for Health in Public Housing

⁶ [The Mental Health Benefits of Exercise](#); HelpGuide.org

⁷ [Diabetes and Mental Health](#); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

⁸ Ibid.

2. **Balanced with a healthy diet, exercise can contribute to weight loss, which can lower one's A1C levels**

People with diabetes are recommended to have a low-fat, low-sugar diet. In addition to a healthy diet, losing weight is a critical point to help lower one's A1C levels. Experts recommend losing at least 5-10% of body weight to reduce A1C levels.⁹



Tips on How to Encourage Patients to Be More Active

1. Implement it into their daily routine.

Instead of taking the elevator, take the stairs. Another strategy is to park further away from stores in order to walk for a bit longer.

2. Do indoor at-home workouts.

Indoor at-home workouts are a great way for diabetic public housing residents to exercise. They can be more affordable than going to a gym and can be more convenient because there is no travel time involved.

Ways that diabetic public housing patients can exercise at home include:

- Working out using small exercise weights or resistance bands
- Accessing workout videos on TV or the internet
- Accessing yoga and/or meditation videos
- Get their family involved in exercising with them, meaning that there are accountability partners involved

3. Use A Common Area

Residents can contact their property manager to see if they can use a common space or community room to exercise. They can recruit other residents in the public housing development to host an exercise event.

4. Promote Guidelines

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, people should have at least 30 minutes of exercise per day, equating to 150 minutes per week.¹⁰

⁹ [Diabetes](#); Johns Hopkins Medicine

¹⁰ [How Much Physical Activity Do Adults Need?](#); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

5. Create An Action Plan

Health centers can help diabetic patients make a clear and concise action plan stating what they will do, where they will do it, when they will do it, and how they will do it to achieve their exercise goals and improve A1C.¹¹

Health Center Promising Practices:

1. [Pennsylvania Association of Community Health Centers Lifestyle Coach Program](#)¹²
The Pennsylvania Association of Community Health Centers has implemented a lifestyle coaching program for diabetes. In this year-long program, participants work with lifestyle coaches to help them learn the skills that they would need to have a healthy diet and exercise routine.
2. [Pounds Off With Empowerment \(POWER\)](#)¹³
Pounds Off With Empowerment is an initiative by Arnold School of Public Health, University of South Carolina, and South Carolina Primary Health Care Association designed to address diabetes and weight loss in rural areas. This program contains regionally and culturally appropriate suggestions for physical activity and changes in diet, as well as goals that are specifically tailored to the individual.
3. [El Rio Community Health Center Diabetes Exercise Program](#)¹⁴
El Rio Community Health Center, located in Tucson, AZ, offers a 12-week diabetes exercise program. In each session, participants spend 30 minutes learning about nutrition, medication, etc., and the other 60 minutes focus strictly on cardio and strength exercise.
4. [Community Health Centers of Wichita Falls, TX Diabetes Empowerment Education Program \(DEEP\) and Healthy Living Classes](#)¹⁵
Community Health Centers of Wichita Falls, Texas offers two diabetes education programs for people with diabetes, prediabetes, or at risk for prediabetes. The Diabetes Empowerment Education Program (DEEP) course lasts 6 weeks. In this course, participants learn about a wide range of diabetes management topics, including physical activity. The Healthy Living classes last for 12 weeks. In the Healthy Living classes, participants get to learn about diabetes, and they also exercise as a part of the course.

¹¹ [Prevent Type 2 Diabetes Program Action Plan Journal](#); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

¹² [Lifestyle Coach](#); Pennsylvania Association of Community Health Centers

¹³ [Pounds Off With Empowerment \(POWER\)](#); Arnold School of Public Health, University of South Carolina, and South Carolina Primary Health Care Association

¹⁴ [El Rio Community Health Center Diabetes Exercise Program](#); El Rio Community Health Center

¹⁵ [Community Health Centers of Wichita Falls, TX Diabetes Empowerment Education Program](#); Community Health Centers of Wichita Falls, TX

Conclusion

Health centers have been taking steps to promote exercise in diabetic patients, in addition to the benefits such as improved mood, weight loss, etc. However, due to certain barriers in public housing developments that can restrict diabetic patients' ability to exercise (crime rates, etc.), they are encouraged to work within these constraints by doing specialized workouts, such as at-home workouts. Since health centers have been actively working with patients to promote exercise and its benefits, they have established several different promising practices that other health centers can also utilize to help diabetic patients living in public housing with their exercise habits.

Disclaimer

This blog post is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$668,800 with 0 percent financed with non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit [hrsa.gov](https://www.hrsa.gov).