

Marketing sport and exercise to women of 55 and over

What interests these women?

Older women, just like women of all ages, see exercise and sport as a way to keep in touch with their friends and meet new people. In fact this is the most important benefit of exercise to them, far above the health benefits.

They are also keen to spend time with their family, and especially to be able to play with the grandchildren, which means that they need to stay in shape.

Exercise that helps them with their life as a whole, and especially focussed on the moment, rather than on the longer term appeals to them. It also needs to be appropriate to their fitness levels, and not make them feel bad about not being as fit and strong as they used to be.

What stops them from taking part?

Normal exercise regimes designed mainly for health benefits (e.g., weight training, aerobics, machine-based exercise) aren't popular with these women. They are seen as boring and unappealing and most of these women are more interested in living for today than preparing for tomorrow, so trying to promote the health benefits of exercise will achieve very limited success.

One big reason why women of this age will stop exercising is the loss of an exercise partner. That exercise partner could have been their husband, a friend or even their dog. But if they are not able to exercise with that partner, because of illness or even death then they are likely to stop doing any themselves.

There are seen to be a lack of opportunities which were aimed at women of this age. Most advertised classes, or groups are aimed at younger people which makes them feel that exercise is not for them. Also they often don't want to take part in classes with much younger people as it makes them feel bad about their ability to do it.

Also, when health promotion experts assume that they understand these women's needs better than they know them themselves they tend to stop listening.

So ... what can you do?

1. Create interesting exercise opportunities specifically for their age group which women can do with their friends, and meet new people through. This could include walking groups, dance classes, tai chi and badminton.
2. Promote sport and exercise around the benefits which they are interested in – meeting people, spending time with their friends and family, and enjoying themselves. Bear in mind when promoting exercise, that these women have got lots more to their life than just their physical fitness. The only longer term benefit which seems to be worth promoting is staying independent by staying fit.
3. Use images of people like them, people in their 50s, 60s, 70s and up, but who are looking very good for their age. For free, high-quality photography go to www.sportengland.org/marketingsport
4. Make sure classes, groups or other opportunities for older women take into consideration the effect of low self-confidence and consider pre-exercise groups. Pay special attention to how vulnerable newcomers are.
5. Listen to them! Ask them what they can do as well as what they would like to do.