

## Exercise Safety

Even though your active older clients are in generally in good health, age-related changes in the physiology of the body must always be taken into consideration during training. These changes increase the risk for adverse events to occur. Adherence to basic exercise safety recommendations can minimize these risks. Specific issues that will be discussed in this section include sensory impairments, thermoregulation issues, and apparel concerns.

### Sensory Impairments: Vision

As detailed earlier, age brings about inevitable deterioration in the senses and can lead to serious safety concerns during exercise, even for active agers. Here are safety recommendations to keep in mind while working with your active agers with vision impairments:

- Use large print if providing handouts or instructions for exercise. At a minimum 14-point font should be used.
- Instructions written on equipment should be reviewed verbally with older clients due to the possibility of equipment misuse due to problems reading the instructions. When using upright cardiovascular training equipment (e.g., treadmill), ALWAYS utilize emergency shut-off clips!
- Use brightly colored tape to increase color contrast whenever possible. Apply tape to objects that may pose a hazard, especially things higher (e.g., lat pulldown bar) or lower (e.g., BOSU) than eye-

level. Also, keep the exercise space free of objects on the floor that may be tripped over.

- When talking with your clients, make sure that you are not in front of a bright light source such as a window or a bank of lights. Glare from the light source may make it difficult for the client to see you clearly. Additionally, make sure that feedback and instructions include verbal and, if necessary, tactile cues in addition to visual cues.
- For clients wearing bifocal/trifocal lenses, be careful during exercises that shift vision up and down because it may cause difficulty in focusing vision.
- If your exercise program involves a change in location with differing light conditions (e.g., indoors to outdoors or even from one room to another), allow the older client to accommodate to the change in light before beginning new exercises.



### Sensory Impairments: Hearing

As detailed earlier, age brings about inevitable deterioration in the senses and can lead to serious safety concerns during exercise, even for active agers. Here are safety recommendations to keep in mind while working with your active agers with hearing impairments:

- Make sure you are always facing your clients when speaking so they can monitor the movement of your lips to increase the likelihood for understanding. Also, make sure you get their attention before starting to speak. In some cases, your client may request that you speak into the “better ear”.
- Speak in a clear and slow manner. If you have a high voice, try to speak in a lower pitch. If necessary, repeat what you have said using different words. Do not put your hands over your face or mouth while speaking and do not eat food or chew gum while talking to a client.
- Do not shout. Aside from being rude, shouting may distort the sound of your voice, particularly in clients who use hearing aids. Make sure that feedback and instructions include visual and, if necessary, tactile cues in addition to verbal cues.
- If there are background noises present (e.g., loud music, weights being racked), you may want to speak to your client in a quiet area if a new exercise that requires instruction is introduced or if your client asks you a question. Consider making a list of talking points or answers to questions and devote time in a quiet location to discuss these with the client.

### Thermoregulation and Clothing

Older adults have issues with thermoregulation during exercise due to a reduction in the sweating response and poorer circulation to the skin than younger adults (52). Well-trained older adults have less problems with this, but it is still important to be aware of signs of heat-related illness, even in controlled temperature conditions. Regularly check the weather conditions prior to training and modify the duration and/or intensity of the session accordingly if extreme temperatures (anything over 75 degrees Fahrenheit) or high humidity (anything over 60%) conditions exist. Have water on hand and encourage your older client to drink water frequently during a workout.



Here are thermoregulation recommendations to keep in mind while working with your active agers:

- Encourage them to dress in layers so that clothes can be removed or added when necessary. Suggest moisture wicking fabrics.
- If exercising outdoors or in a facility with natural sunlight, encourage your clients to wear light-colored fabrics to reflect the light so that excess heat will not be absorbed. Provide adequate breaks for hydration.

- If your client complains of persistent musculoskeletal pain in the foot or legs that does not resolve with corrective exercise, recommend a podiatrist or a reputable specialty shoe dealer to fit the foot properly.