

Aerobic and strength training exercise programme for cognitive impairment in people with mild to moderate dementia: the DAPA RCT

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Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

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Plain English summary

The DAPA RCT

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Plain English summary

Dementia is a progressive brain disease for which there is currently no cure. The disease reduces the ability to plan thoughts and movements, make decisions and remember things. People with dementia can feel confused, disorientated and frightened. Many live with the diagnosis for years in the community and, ultimately, may require nursing care. The causes of the disease are complex and not fully understood. However, research over the last 10 years suggests that exercise may help, as it improves blood flow to the brain and releases chemicals from muscles. To see if this is so, we asked nearly 500 people with dementia and their carers to join this research study. We tracked the thinking abilities of people with dementia, as well as their independence, body functioning, mental health and enjoyment of life. We also looked at the costs of all the health and social services they used. We asked two-thirds of the people with dementia to try out a new exercise programme, which included 4 months of face-to-face sessions that involved going to a group class twice a week and trying to do more exercise at home. Participants then tried to carry on the exercise programme at home for 8 months with some support provided by physiotherapists. We tracked nearly all of the people who signed up for the trial. Two-thirds of those who asked to go to the exercise classes attended the majority of sessions. One-third of the people did not complete the exercise classes. The results showed that people enjoyed the exercise classes and that very frail people managed to join in. Physical fitness and muscle strength improved. However, body functioning, mental health and enjoyment in life were no different from the group who did not take the exercise programme. Thinking abilities were a little worse in the group who did the exercise.

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This report

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