

Peer-led walking programme to increase physical activity in inactive 60- to 70-year-olds: Walk with Me pilot RCT

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Plain English summary

Walk with Me pilot RCT

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Plain English summary

Many older people would benefit from taking more regular physical activity, especially those living in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage. Interventions delivered by trained members of the public who are from a similar background and of a similar age have shown promise at increasing people's physical activity levels in previous research. These individuals are known as peer mentors. This study aimed to develop an intervention, to be delivered by peers, to enable older adults to become more active. The practicality of delivering and evaluating this intervention was then tested in a trial.

The 'Walk with Me' intervention was developed using guidance from previous successful interventions and with input from older adults. Interviews with older people from socioeconomically disadvantaged communities indicated that many lived busy lives and felt that having a peer mentor to walk with would help them become more active. Interviews also indicated that the intervention should be tailored to individuals' abilities using personalised physical activity goals, such as daily step goals.

Fifty individuals aged 60–70 years agreed to take part. Half were allocated by chance to a 12-week walking intervention and half to a control group who received an information booklet on how to become active. The intervention group monitored their daily steps using a pedometer. These individuals met with a peer mentor to set walking goals and take part in physical activity in their local community. After 6 months, most participants (93%) were still in the study and returned information. Participants rated the intervention favourably in in-depth interviews and reported increasing their activity. However, the study was not large enough to show if this was a real change. The study showed that it would be possible to conduct a study to definitively test if a walking intervention delivered by peer mentors can increase older adults' physical activity.

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