In This Issue

International contributions to this issue of *JAPA* cover a diverse range of topics including the effects of respiratory resistance training, understanding physical activity patterns of the emerging “Boomer” cohort, the influence of physical inactivity on chronic disease, validation of a new telephone-based physical activity assessment tool, the “Phone-FITT,” investigation of factors associated with nonparticipation by older adults in physical activity, and an examination of the 6-min walk test employed under different test conditions. In keeping with *JAPA*’s international flavor, this issue includes authors from Australia, Netherlands, Greece, Canada, and the United States. Although all seven contributions to this issue of *JAPA* make a substantive contribution to the growing body of physical activity and aging literature, three articles in our opinion should be highlighted.

Participants new to exercise often complain that they are “winded” and uncomfortable, especially when exercising at intensities (moderate to vigorous) required to engender fitness and health (Paterson, Jones, & Rice, 2007). Progressive respiratory-muscle conditioning, as described by Watsford and Murphy, reduced subjective perceived exertion and submaximal exercise heart rate and improved ventilation and treadmill performance time in older women. What makes this study unique is the progressive training regimen and the fact that the authors chose to evaluate change based on performance outcomes that challenge respiratory function, rather than less intense activities. This exercise strategy might benefit both healthy older adults and those undergoing respiratory rehabilitation.

As gerontologists we have for some time heralded the coming tide of older adults, dubbed the “Boomer” generation (Wister, 2005). Swan and colleagues provide us with some insight into the physical activity characteristics of this emerging cohort. Moderate physical activity levels are similar across 10-year age cohorts, and significant declines are only observed in the oldest old, suggesting that Boomers continue to be as physically active as younger adult groups, at least for moderate-intensity activities. The authors point out that this is likely influenced by the fact that Boomers enjoy more leisure time, a result of retirement; higher socioeconomic status; and better health and health care than older “traditional” aging cohorts. Unfortunately, vigorous and strengthening activities, both being very important components of fitness, do not follow the same trajectory but decline with increasing age. Although this analysis was limited to 3 years, this article should help generate discussion among health promoters on how to more effectively target physical activity interventions in the future.

Most physical activity questionnaires neglect to capture the frequency, intensity, and duration (time) of physical activity performed. This is especially true of physical activity tools specific to older adults, which often have limited evidence to support their suitability, as was evident in a systematic review previously published in *JAPA* (Jørstad-Stein et al., 2005). Gill, Jones, Zou, and Speechley have taken the next step with the development and testing of the Phone-FITT questionnaire. The Phone-FITT generates a score based on the frequency, intensity, and duration
of the physical activity performed. The Phone-FITT was validated against accelerometer data and was shown to be a reliable and valid indicator of physical activity, specifically in those 75 years and older who were still considered community dwelling and independent. Gill and colleagues report that the addition of intensity did not further improve the reliability of the overall physical activity score in this cohort, and they acknowledge that this might be the result of the subjectivity and complexity associated with reporting on such traditional lower intensity tasks (i.e., housework, leisure). However, it is the intensity at which physical activity or exercise is performed that will engender fitness and ward off dependency in all older adults (Paterson et al., 2007). Nevertheless, this tool will provide researchers with a vehicle in which to capture more meaningful physical activity data from large epidemiological studies (e.g., fall-intervention trials) by including the frequency, intensity, and duration of activity in the total physical activity score.

We hope that you find these contributions stimulating and of interest to furthering your gerontology and physical activity research agenda.

References


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