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## Declining Mobility Deepens Elders' Isolation

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Photo Courtesy of: Jean-Pierre Clatot/AFP/Getty Images

We all know how important exercise is. Doctors say 20-minutes a day will make a big difference in your health and dramatically reduce the risk of a whole host of diseases like diabetes, heart disease and dementia. But what happens when older adults can no longer drive to a gym or go for a simple walk. WDET's Martina Guzman reports on the significance of exercise and movement in metro-Detroit's aging population

Gabriela Boyd is a very busy senior...at 75-years old...she says she as active as ever. She works for a neighborhood non-profit, teaches English as a second language to Latinas in Southwest Detroit and gives nutrition classes. Boyd was in the parking lot of the center where she teaches – hurrying to her next appointment. She says that her age staying busy helps fight feelings of isolation.

"The most important thing is to have a goal in life so as a senior if you don't feel that you are necessary, that you are important, that you can contribute to the community...at that moment you start dying. That's why I keep myself busy."

But not all seniors are like Boyd. Many can't drive anymore, can't accomplish simple tasks



around the house or do things they once loved like gardening. Boyd says a lack of mobility strips away their independence and can have a deep psychological impact on people in her age group.

"They feel that they are stuck, they feel useless they feel incompetent so that is a very terrible thing... "It's one of the main things that keeps them isolated...this is the worst thing that can happen to you."

Lack of mobility is one of the key factors in isolation within the aging population. Seclusion puts older adults at greater risk for developing depression. According to the Center for disease control...the 65 and older population accounts for 15 percent of the nation's suicides... the highest rate among any age group.

But if staying active can be a challenge for young people, it's especially challenging if you're older, have body aches or a debilitating illnesses. Cathy Lysack is the Deputy Director of the Institute of Gerontology at Wayne State University. She's currently writing a book about aging and mobility. She says...seniors have to keep moving no matter how old they are.

"Most older adults think...oh, I'm too weak, it's bad for me ...the opposite is true...even women with significant arthritis will benefit with less fatigue and less pain if they exercise...

Lysack says that failing to exercise or avoiding exercise not only affects seniors physically it also affects their ability to think clearly or rationally.

"You may not be able to drive a car...it's a complex skill. And when that happens your social environment shrinks very quickly... if you don't have the resources and people to offset that... you're at risk for isolation socially and that's bad for older people."

The Latin American for Social and Economic Development otherwise known as LASED created fitness classes tailored to the needs of the aging community. Their goal... is to keep seniors moving.

(Singing) "take a deep breath...hands out front...make a fist..."

On a Monday afternoon at Mexicantown's Welcome Center, dozens of seniors sit in front of folding chairs. They walk in place to the beat of the music...stretching and shaking their hands in the air. 60-year-old Lyndy Tallessen is the fitness instructor. She's been teaching the class to seniors for more than a year. She says her method isn't designed to train them for the senior Olympics but to keep them mobile.

"it helps them do everyday activities, just moving around it's important for their balance, their strength, agility."

Tallessen says in the year she's been teaching class... she's noticed a dramatic difference in some of the seniors.

"There is one particular participant...when she first came in she was on a rolling walker...she had to stop to take a breath after every step...now she's more mobile she can move."

Tallessen says she loves seeing seniors moving but most importantly she says she loves seeing them break the cycle of isolation part of a community through exercise.

"It's really good for them because they get out and they are among people...the camaraderie among people helps their mind.

By 2020, 1/3 of the population will be of retirement age. As we get use to the fact that we are living longer... we are taking steps to stay active sharp and engaged. After all, Lysack reminds us that we are only ok with aging as long as were in good health.

I'm Martina Guzman WDET News.

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