

Executive Summary

EASY Tool (Exercise & Physical Activity Screening for You)

It's important for adults of all ages to attain a goal of performing 30 minutes of moderate activity most days of the week for their health and function in daily life. Unfortunately, most adults do not meet the level of physical activity recommended for maintaining health and function, and older adults are among the most sedentary Americans.

Given the controversy about whether to “screen or not” before initiating an exercise program, we would like to offer an alternative paradigm that helps health care providers and other persons working with older adults to know what activities are safe and effective for older adults. In line with recent research indicating that the risks of being physically inactive far outweigh the risks of adverse events associated with being physically active, we propose that older adults should be encouraged to incorporate more physical activity into their daily routines (e.g., walking, gardening, doing household chores).

Older adults should be able to safely initiate a graduated activity program at the low or moderate intensity level without first checking with their health care providers. Awareness of safety tips to consider prior to starting and stopping exercise are important for minimizing any risks. Similarly, it is beneficial if there are regular discussions between older adults and their health care providers about the types of exercise that can be safely conducted by older adults with various illness symptomatology, chronic diseases and disabilities to maximize exercise benefits.

In an attempt to establish a more appropriate method of screening older adults prior to initiating a physical activity program, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation supported the development of an expert panel of interdisciplinary researchers and clinicians with extensive experience in establishing physical activity programs for older adults. The panel has developed the EASY (Exercise/Physical Activity Screening for You) Tool to help individuals, healthcare providers and exercise professionals include all older individuals in exercise and help match the individual to an appropriate exercise program.

The purpose of the EASY Tool is to provide a comprehensive screening tool that identifies multiple potential risk factors associated with exercise such as underlying cardiovascular or musculoskeletal disorders or falls; remind those at risk to discuss their problems with healthcare professionals; and provide the individual or the screener with recommendations for safe and appropriate activities in light of known risk factors. The EASY Tool was designed to be dynamic, accessible, applicable to numerous populations, easy to use & easy to understand. The Tool includes a web-based and paper-based system, as well as an on-line toolkit to provide additional resources in screening & assessment.

