

October 21, 2015

Follow AHS_Media on Twitter 

Exercise program shown to decrease use of health services

Participants in exercise program have fewer visits to doctor, emergency department

CALGARY—Calgarians participating in an Alberta Health Services (AHS) supervised exercise program are feeling stronger and healthier, leading to fewer doctor visits and less time in emergency departments.

A recent study looked at more than 2,700 clients in the AHS Calgary Zone who completed the exercise program between 2011 and 2013. Results showed program participants made 30 per cent fewer visits to their family doctor one year after completing the exercise program. That number was even greater for patients who had multiple chronic conditions; those individuals reported a 35 per cent drop in doctor visits. Similarly, participants visited an emergency department 40 per cent less one year after beginning in the program.

“My kudos to the health care professionals and the participants of this study,” says Sarah Hoffman, Minister of Health. “This kind of research is crucial to not only health professionals so they can give the best advice and care to patients, but also individuals who want to take an active role in improving their health.”

Supervised exercise is part of AHS’ Alberta Healthy Living Program, which supports those living with chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, obesity and heart disease. In addition to exercise, the program provides patient education, self-management workshops and one-on-one nutrition counselling.

“One of AHS’ primary goals is engaging Albertans as partners and providing them with the supports they need to improve their health, or maintain their good health – and that’s precisely what the Alberta Healthy Living Program is doing,” says Teresa Krahn, program manager in the AHS Calgary Zone. “We’re keeping people healthy in their communities and, by doing so, we’re also easing pressures on our health system.”

Participants learn how to use exercise equipment, understand the principles of how to exercise safely, are provided with information and education on the components of exercise (how to improve heart health, strength, flexibility and balance), and are provided with the tools to be able to develop their own exercise program. They are also provided support in transitioning to a community exercise program.

“Being active is such an important part of managing one’s chronic health condition,” says Krahn. “Our program is led by a variety of trained health care professionals. It’s a very welcoming and supportive environment, no matter what your ability level is.”

Shirley Servis, 73, was worried about her loss of flexibility, particularly the risk of falling on winter ice. The Calgary woman started the program at her local YMCA last spring after being referred by her family doctor.

“What I really appreciated was the attention to each participant,” says Servis, who noticed the variety of ages, abilities and health conditions among participants. “We all had different reasons for being there but made it fun for everyone.”

Servis lives with spinal stenosis – narrowing of the open spaces within the spine – and deals with chronic back pain. The support she received gave her more strength and confidence.

“I’m not scared of falling as much because I feel strong,” she says. “I’ve already recommended the program to others and I told my doctor to keep promoting it with patients.”

In the Calgary Zone, the Alberta Healthy Living Program’s supervised exercise program serves about 1,500 individuals per year. Classes are offered at nine locations in and around Calgary.

Classes range in size from eight to 20 participants and are supervised by a team of health care providers including physiotherapists, occupational therapists, respiratory therapists, kinesiologists and a recreation therapist. Participants can self-refer or have their physician refer them to the program.

Visit www.albertahealthservices.ca/10356.asp to find out about supervised exercise programs in your area and other chronic disease management programs offered through the Alberta Healthy Living Program, or call Health Link at 811.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

- 30 -

For media inquiries, contact:

Tara Grindle
AHS Communications
403-894-6655 (cell)