

Expanding Physical Activity Opportunities in South Dakota

Challenge

According to 2019 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System data, only 22% of South Dakotans meet the recommended amount of aerobic and muscle strengthening guidelines. Access to physical activity opportunities across the state can also be challenging, as some individuals must travel long distances to access nearest facilities or programming opportunities.

Key Components

In 2018, South Dakota State University (SDSU) Extension adopted two evidence-based physical activity programs, *Walk With Ease* and *Fit & Strong!* to offer statewide. South Dakota adults are the primary target audience for both programs, with an extra emphasis on individuals living with arthritis.

Walk With Ease is an evidence-based, six-week walking program developed jointly by the Thurston Arthritis Research Center and the Institute on Aging of the University of North Carolina. The program has been shown to reduce pain and improve overall health in program participants. Whether participants need relief from arthritis or chronic pain, or just want to be active—if they can be on their feet for 10 minutes without increased pain, participants can find success with *Walk With Ease*.

Fit & Strong! is an evidence-based physical activity and fall prevention program developed by researchers at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The program is eight or twelve weeks and includes education on a variety of health topics and discusses how physical activity can help manage symptoms and pain. The program covers safe stretching techniques, balance exercises, lower extremity exercises, resistance band exercises, and aerobics. Participants develop physical activity techniques that are sustainable after the *Fit & Strong!* program ends. SDSU Extension has implemented the program statewide and is the current license holder.

Both programs are offered in-person and virtually.



“I have rather severe arthritis and was ‘babying’ my body too much when I was stiff and in pain. This program got me moving which lessened the stiffness, and I would feel so much better! The leader had such good advice on gradually increasing my movement so I wouldn’t overdo! It was surprising how fast you can improve! Good luck with the workshops and keep on moving!”

– Take a Step and Walk With Ease Program Participant

“I believe this exercise program has helped me greatly! I now can get out of bed without problems with leg & hip stiffness, go up and down stairs much more easily, and just feel better overall with more energy and ambition. I’ve even lost a few pounds which is always good. The exercises make me feel stronger, and I’ve really enjoyed them. Keep up the good work!”

– Fit & Strong @ Home Participant (virtual delivery)

Results

In 2018, SDSU Extension trained the first two instructors in both *Walk With Ease* and *Fit & Strong!*. Since this training, additional funding and program expansion has occurred. Currently, there are over 26 active South Dakota *Fit & Strong!* leaders and 19 *Walk With Ease* leaders across the state. Additionally, SDSU Extension has two trained Master Trainers in *Fit & Strong!*.

Walk With Ease

Since 2018, over 651 individuals have participated in 37 *Walk With Ease* workshops. Participants indicated a change in confidence managing their joint pain and/or stiffness from 7.6 to 8.0 on a scale of 1-10.

Fit & Strong!

Since 2018, over 276 individuals have participated in over 22 *Fit & Strong!* workshops. In 2020, South Dakota was part of the *Fit & Strong! @ Home* pilot, which helped develop the virtual delivery of the program. Since the pilot, *Fit & Strong! @ Home* is offered as a virtual opportunity statewide in South Dakota.

“I thought I would hate the virtual classes, but glad you were offering something we could do it home! I LOVED it! So easy to do it in my living room with a new group of friends online. It was easy to follow and I think it really helped me stay in shape and live through the isolation issues and lack of exercise facilities.”

– *Fit & Strong @ Home* Participant (virtual delivery)

Evidence-Based Interventions

[Community-Based Social Support for Physical Activity: Scientifically Supported](#) (Strategies with this rating are most likely to make a difference. These strategies have been tested in many robust studies with consistently positive results.)

Next Steps

SDSU Extension is continuing to offer and expand both *Walk with Ease* and *Fit & Strong!* in the state of South Dakota. They are working closely with their local (i.e. SD Department of Health, trained leaders) and national (i.e. Osteoarthritis Action Alliance, National Council on Aging) partners to plan for sustainability and continued implementation of both programs. These two programs are also part of the overarching umbrella of Better Choices, Better Health SD Programs®. Volunteers are always welcome to reach out and get involved as leaders.

Resources:

Fit & Strong: <https://extension.sdstate.edu/fit-strong>

Walk With Ease: <https://extension.sdstate.edu/walk-ease>

SDSU Extension Food and Families Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/SDSUExtensionFoodandFamilies>

Physical Activity Workshops: <https://goodandhealthysd.org/bcbh/physical-activity-workshops/>

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