

G50 . 1



**FIFTY PLUS**  
**all to**  
**play**  
**for**

**A Manual for  
Organisers  
of Sport  
and Recreation  
for Older People**



11423-69760

## Introduction

Older people are less and less inclined to accept a decline in their physical powers. Nor should they accept it. It is well established that the right sort of exercise can actually roll back the years. Stiffness, lack of muscle power, poor stamina - even some chronic illness - can all be helped by keeping, or becoming, active.



And it's fun - getting involved with others and inspiring a new outlook on life. Games and sports that people now regret avoiding at school, or dropping right after, can be picked up again. Many new activities are there to be enjoyed.

Statistics show that people aged 45 and over will account for 50% of the adult population in the year 2000 - a rise of 1.2 million in less than a decade. This age group is becoming increasingly affluent and will have more disposable income to spend on leisure. From 1992-1997 it is predicted that the growth rate of discretionary income for the 45-59 age group will be in the region of £10 billion.

So, as an organiser of 50+ activities, you have a rich potential market. This booklet is about tapping into that potential - as an individual, a group, an organisation, a leisure centre - and starting something. There's information on:

- ▶ what activities have been shown to be successful for 50+s (page 2)
- ▶ how to get started - market research, help with activities (pages 5,6)
- ▶ networking - working with other organisations (pages 9,10,11)
- ▶ publicity - the right pitch, the media, keeping it up (pages 11,12,13)
- ▶ Sports Council regional offices (page 16).

But first, this page and page 4 identify some of the most popular activities enjoyed by older people and highlight some important advice about the medical safeguards that are necessary for 50+ physical activity. They're not offputting, but it is vital that people are fit enough to get the huge benefits that come from physical activity; also that the activity is programmed properly to develop fitness.

## **Successful activities for the 50+s**

Since 50+ physical recreation became something of a campaign in the early 1980s, more and more activities have been tried and found to be successful. Here are some you may wish to consider promoting. (But bear in mind that you may need to find out what your potential participants, rather than you, fancy - see page 5.)

### **Indoors, (little equipment required)**

<i>Keep fit</i>	<i>Carpet bowls</i>
<i>Aerobics</i>	<i>Short mat bowls</i>
<i>Dance</i>	<i>Table tennis</i>
	<i>Ballroom dancing</i>

### **Outdoors, (little equipment required)**

<i>Walking, rambling</i>
<i>Cycling</i>
<i>Jogging</i>
<i>Mini-marathons</i>

### **Particularly popular**

*Archery*  
*Canoeing, boating*  
*Croquet*  
*Golf*  
*Tennis*  
*Swimming*  
*Weight training*  
*Soft volleyball*  
*Cricket*  
*Hockey*  
*Bowls*  
*Tea dancing*

### **And even...**

*Land yachting*  
*Water skiing*  
*Windsurfing*  
*Gliding*  
*Sub-aqua*  
*Basketball*  
*Snooker*  
*Skiing*





*'Almost all over 50s, however sedentary, or whatever their health problem, will benefit from exercise, provided progress is slow and cautious.'*

This quote is taken from a book that should be regarded as a companion volume to this booklet. Called *A safe approach for leaders*, it is written by two doctors from Nottingham University Medical School, Professor PH Fentem and Dr EJ Bassey and published by the Sports Council. Anybody who is starting activities for the over-50s can obtain a copy from Sports Council Headquarters address on page 16 of this booklet.

# The safe approach

The book's message can be summarised.

- ▶ From the age of 40, but increasingly after 50, our bodies tend to deteriorate. This is felt in loss of joint mobility, muscle power and stamina. Women seem to lose these faster than men.
- ▶ This deterioration is hastened by lack of exercise. Generally, the over-50s take less effective exercise than they think.
- ▶ Exercise of the right kind and at the right pace can reverse this deterioration. Approximately three, 20-minute periods of moderate exercise a week should do it; other chronic illness may also be helped.
- ▶ Before the over-50s embark on a programme of regular exercise, their starting fitness needs to be established. This may mean their talking to a doctor.
- ▶ The exercise itself needs to be approached gradually; warning signs need to be noted.



The responsibility for all this lies with the participant, of course, but also with the leader. It is important to strike a balance between creating fear by over stressing the possible dangers of exercise, and ignoring the realities that may limit activity. *A safe approach for leaders* gives quite detailed advice on this.

## **Setting up safely**

The introductory chapter deals with the different motives and starting points there are for the sort of people who are likely to take up physical activity over the age of 50. The chapter on physiological cornerstones describes why joints, muscles and stamina deteriorate with age and how far exercise can restore them. The differences between anaerobic and aerobic exercise - important for developing stamina and endurance safely - are described.

The all-important medical checks are detailed: cardiovascular, respiratory and orthopaedic problems are the main things to watch out for. How to get medical advice is also covered. Assessing the likely physical condition of the people who come forward to join in physical activity is important. Some people will simply not be able to take part; all must be watched for signs of physical distress.

A chapter covers good practice - things to avoid; the importance of warming up (and down); footwear, clothing and equipment; record keeping. The 60+s are not forgotten: there is a final chapter that dispels the myth that active life ends at 60, but which does deal with the particular issues for this age group.

The book has to be fairly detailed, has to take medical issues seriously - but is keen not to put people off:

*' We have concentrated on the precautions and caveats in these guidelines so that you can help them to begin safely and effectively. The warnings are mainly for you, not for them. This should not leave you with a negative impression. We are entirely convinced of the benefits of exercise. The hazards of inactivity are much more serious than any associated with exercise.'*

Finally, *A safe approach for leaders* is published for people who already have experience of organising physical activities. If you haven't, approach the governing body of the activity (see page 7) for details of their coaching and training schemes.

# Getting started

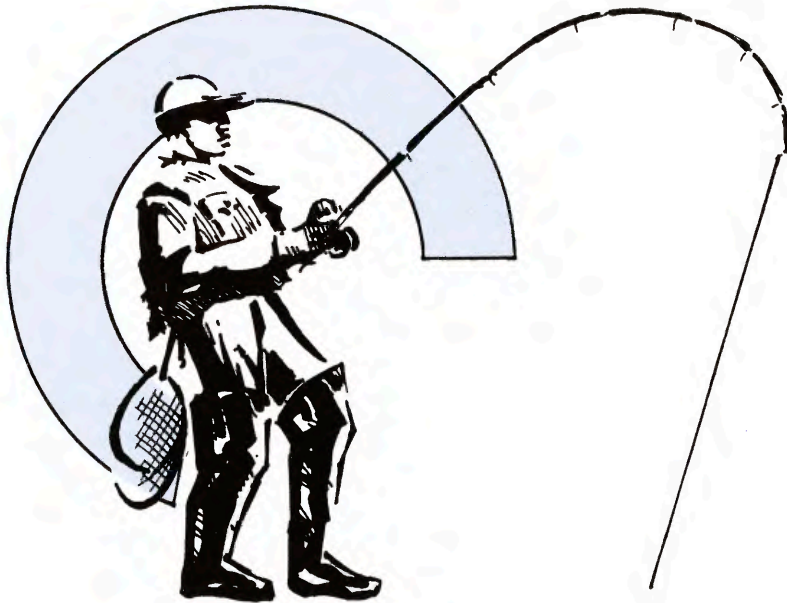
**W**hether you're an individual, a club, or even run a leisure centre, you are likely to have a reasonable idea of who you want to attract to 50+ activities. Unless for some reason you're already committed to a particular activity, it's better to find out what your potential participants want. So market research should come first.

## **Market research**

It may have been a long time since some older people last took part in organised physical activity; they are therefore going to need quite sensitive handling before they commit themselves. So you want to make sure you offer an attractive package. There are many ways to find out what activities will appeal. Asking or phoning around, letters, questionnaires, sticking up notices - provided you are convinced of the importance of market research, the process will emerge.

It can be useful to find out at the same time what format is likely to work best:

- ▶ will a charge be acceptable?
- ▶ can people afford any personal equipment the activity requires?
- ▶ when should it be, how often and for how long?
- ▶ is the likely location well known and acceptable?
- ▶ are people able to get to it?
- ▶ will mixing age groups work?



Some of these questions you may need to answer yourself, based on the experience you already have of organising groups.

Before thinking about how to publicise your activity (see page 11), you may well need to get some help and advice on the activity itself.



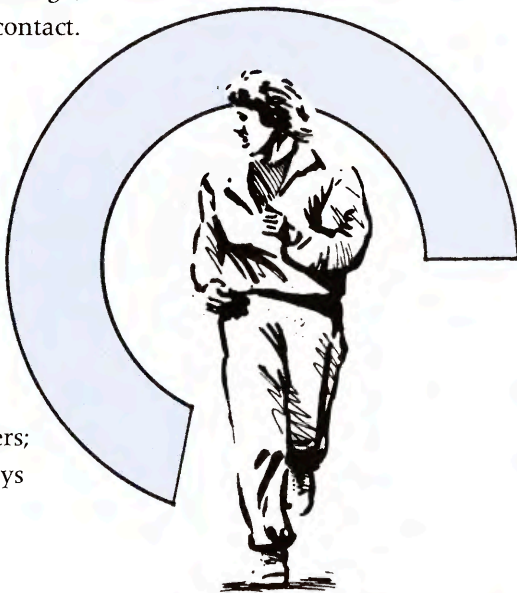
## Help with activities

A good starting point is the local authority leisure/recreation department: it may help with equipment, facilities and even finance; it should also have details of local clubs, groups, coaches, umpires, regulations etc. The Sports Council headquarters on page 16 will be able to put you in touch with the relevant national governing bodies.

The three most popular physical activities for 50+s - swimming, walking and keep fit - are well catered for.

**SWIMMING** As an all-round exercise for joints, muscles and stamina, swimming is an obvious choice. Most public pools will be prepared to set aside a part of the day when they're not busy to host a class. And they are likely to charge less, especially for older people. School pools may be interested in extending use. A group could be dedicated to beginners, to distance swimming, survival techniques, aqua-exercise, advanced strokes etc. The Amateur Swimming Association (Harold Fern House, Derby Square, Loughborough, Leicestershire LE11 0AL) is a good contact.

**WALKING** The progress from a gentle stroll to strenuous hill walks is a good model for the way that physical activity can progressively help the 50+s. The Ramblers Association (1-5 Wandsworth Road, London SW8 2LJ) offers guidance and advice on good routes. There are many clubs already, keen to attract new members; weekend and longer walking holidays are increasingly popular.



**KEEP FIT** Within aerobics, dance etc, there is a range of activities that seem, from their popularity with older exercisers, to have something to offer most people. And there are a number of well-established national governing bodies - too many to list in full, but including the Keep Fit Association, Medau Society, Margaret Morris Movement, and Health and Beauty Exercise; Extend caters specifically for elderly and disabled people. For more information contact the Sports Council headquarters.

**COMPETITION** Some national governing bodies organise competitive events for older players: cricket, hockey, tennis and judo are examples.

**IN GENERAL** The sort of bodies to think about for specialist advice on your activities might include:

- ▶ local authority departments responsible for sport and recreation
- ▶ sports centres, clubs and swimming pools,
- ▶ adult, further and higher education who may already have classes
- ▶ the national and regional Sports Councils
- ▶ playing fields associations
- ▶ governing bodies of sport.

Looking at successes in organising physical activities for the 50+s (or, indeed, anybody else), it's clear that a key element is making productive links with other interests. There are many allies to be found, often to mutual benefit. This applies to setting up a group, and to maintaining its success.

# Networking

## **Sports and leisure centres**

If your club is set up by or at a centre, it should benefit from support by the management. Clubs can meet there (preferably at slack times), organise festivals and competitions, social events and even holidays. Many clubs provide significant help with other activities in the centres - perhaps for people with disabilities. Some become a focal point for older people in the community and provide a valuable service to the centre, rather than being a drain on resources.

## **Local and health authorities**

Health authorities and health education units (funded, sometimes, by a number of different authorities) have backed campaigns for the 50+s. This brings the advantage of medical contacts as well as promotional opportunities. In general, the different authorities will already have links with each other, which is useful. Even a parish council might be able to help.

If you need transport, local authority social services may help if they (or a voluntary organisation associated with them) already run a community transport scheme.

## Employers

The advantages of a fitter work force are obvious, and employers may be persuaded to provide support for 50+ activity. This can range from help with promotion to funding and organising specific activities for a club. If your own employer is sympathetic, you might be able to organise a 50+ group of employees, based on company premises.

## Local media

Clearly a good publicity campaign (page 11) will lean heavily on local and regional newspapers, radio and tv. Beyond that, though, the media may become actively involved in sponsoring a group, or a one-off event.

## Networking contacts

Altogether, there are a host of possible contacts that may help your club along. Here are just a few:

- ▶ pre-retirement groups
- ▶ health and fitness clubs
- ▶ movement and dance groups
- ▶ Countryside Commission
- ▶ tourist boards and information centres
- ▶ national parks and water authorities
- ▶ adult, further and higher education
- ▶ local councils of voluntary service
- ▶ church and village halls, theatres etc
- ▶ community groups





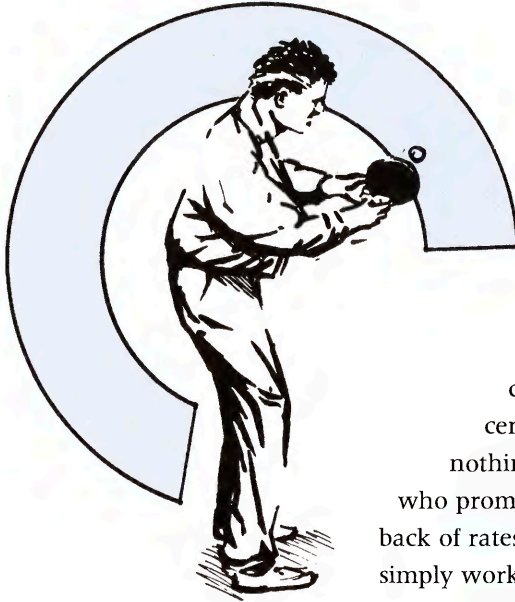
- ▶ social clubs
- ▶ pubs
- ▶ rotary, round table, lions etc
- ▶ women's organisations
- ▶ schools and parents' associations
- ▶ Age Concern, Help the Aged
- ▶ leisure centres
- ▶ universities of the third age.

# Publicity

**Y**ou know what people want, you know how to provide it (and safely), you've made the necessary networking arrangements and you probably have a core of interested people already. Now you need to let everybody know about it - in a society that is crowded with rival attractions. You have to get people's attention, persuade them out of their armchairs, and convince them that what you are offering will be good fun as well as good for them. (And you must plan and budget for publicity from the start.)

## **The pitch**

The first objective is to be clear about your strong points, and about avoiding any weak ones. Be positive about how the club is described and named, assuring people that the environment will be sympathetic, the pace reasonable and that they will meet people who, like them, are there to enjoy themselves as they get fitter.



## **Publicity distribution**

Having got the message right, and incorporated (perhaps with a logo) in posters, leaflets, stickers, badges, t-shirts or whatever, you need to get it to potential participants. You may have a captive audience - say, leisure centre visitors (though probably nothing as penetrating as the council who promoted its 50+ campaign on the back of rates demands). Otherwise, you simply work out where 50+s go and make sure your material is there. So consider:

- ▶ pre-retirement groups
- ▶ Age Concern and Help the Aged
- ▶ women's organisations
- ▶ leisure centres
- ▶ places of work - via contacts or personnel departments
- ▶ doctors' and dentists' surgeries and health centres
- ▶ local shops and shopping centres
- ▶ libraries and DSS offices
- ▶ pubs and clubs
- ▶ public transport
- ▶ community groups
- ▶ churches and village halls.

## The media

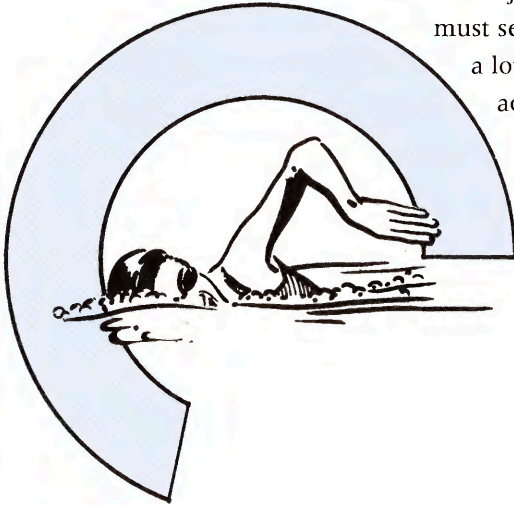
One paragraph in the local paper may pull in more people than a dozen posters; also it gives the campaign an indefinable authority, such is the power of the media. And as for radio and even television.... So it is worth sending your publicity material to the media - with some sort of press release. The release needs to lead with the punchiest thing you can think of to say about the activity. At least it should be 'the first programme of over 50s activity in the area' or 'a chance to turn back the years' - something. Better still, get a local figure - the mayor, a celebrated octogenarian, whatever - to launch the group and perhaps be available with you for interview on local radio or, if you're very lucky, regional tv.

If you have such a figure behind you, they may be the obvious person for the launch, to which you may well invite the media.

## Opening

The first session is all-important - and not just for its publicity potential. People will come to see if it's for them; others will stay away and wait for the word-of-mouth feedback before deciding

whether to join. So that first session must set the right tone. Clearly a lot depends on the actual activity and the venue, but generally what's laid on must take account of these factors.



- ▶ For many it will be their first experience of a group like this, and perhaps of a venue like this. They must be put at ease on both counts.
- ▶ It may be that the first session should be mainly introductions, descriptions, demonstrations, plenty of opportunity to ask questions.
- ▶ It is important, nevertheless, to give all participants at least some chance to start the activity - to get a feel for it.
- ▶ The social side is important: if that doesn't work, the activity may not get established. There must be room for fun.

### **Keeping it going**

Maintaining the momentum, once started, is mainly about providing something people want. Here are some ideas that have worked (and don't forget about networking -page 9).

- ▶ Free admission for members who bring a friend
- ▶ Come-and-try-it taster sessions
- ▶ Multi-activity sessions
- ▶ Mixing in social activities - cards, flower arranging etc
- ▶ Courses for improvement
- ▶ Courses for trainers/leaders/coaches
- ▶ Recruit 50+ helpers
- ▶ Lunchtime sessions
- ▶ Competitions
- ▶ Family sessions
- ▶ Arrange physical activities - eg walking, cycling, swimming,
- ▶ Trips, weekends, holidays
- ▶ Regular social evenings



## Further reading

BERNARD M, *Positive approaches to ageing: leisure and lifestyle in later life*, Staffordshire: Beth Johnson Foundation; 1988

COUNSEL AND CARE FOR THE ELDERLY, *Not only bingo - counsel and care - a study of good practice in providing recreation and leisure activities for older people in care*, London: Counsel and care for the elderly; 1993

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, *Health and healthy living - a guide for older people*, Lancashire: Department of Health: 1991

FENTEM PH, BASSEY EJ, *50+ A safe approach for leaders*, London: Sports Council; 1985

HENLEY CENTRE, *Planning for social change 1993/94*, Henley Centre: London; 1993

LEES, *Fit to be 50*, Chapmans

LONG J, WIMBUSH E, *Continuity and change: leisure around retirement - reports on research into the beliefs and attitudes of people to retirement and the role leisure can play in adapting to retirement*, London: Sports Council; 1985

MUIR GRAY J A, *Better health in retirement - a guide to improving the quality of life in retirement by retaining fitness and looking after the body*, London: Age Concern; 1982

## **Sports Council offices**

Your first point of contact for advice will usually be the local sports centre or council recreation/leisure department. Further information is also available from the Sports Council's headquarters in London. The Council has ten regional offices that work closely with regional and county governing bodies of sport, local sports councils and many other agencies in order to develop and implement regional strategies for sport.

### **The Sports Council Information Unit**

16 Upper Woburn Place  
London WC1H 0QP  
071-388 1277

### **Northern Region**

Aykley Heads  
Durham DH1 5UU  
091-384 9595

### **North West Region**

Astley House  
Quay Street  
Manchester M3 4AE  
061-834 0338

### **Yorkshire and Humberside Region**

Coronet House  
Queen Street  
Leeds LS1 4PW  
(0532) 436443

### **Greater London Region**

PO Box 480  
Crystal Palace  
National Sports Centre  
Ledrington Road  
London SE19 2BQ  
081-778 8600

### **South East Region**

PO Box 480  
Crystal Palace  
National Sports Centre  
Ledrington Road  
London SE19 2BQ  
Tel: 081-778 8600

### **East Midland Region**

Grove House  
Bridgford Road  
West Bridgford  
Nottingham NG2 6AP  
(0602) 821887

**Southern Region**

51A Church Street  
Caversham  
Reading  
Berkshire RG4 8AX  
(0734) 483311

**South Western Region**

Ashlands House  
Ashlands Crewkerne  
Somerset TA18 7LQ  
(0460) 73491

**West Midlands Region**

Metropolitan House  
1 Hagley Road  
Edgbaston  
Birmingham B16 8TT  
021-456 3444

**Eastern Region**

Crescent House  
19 The Crescent  
Bedford MK40 2QP  
(0234) 345222

**© The Sports Council 1994**

16 Upper Woburn Place,  
London WC1H 0QP  
071-388 1277

SC/189/10M/3/94

Designed by Spark Ceresa, London

Copywriter: Brian Guthrie

Printed by Belmont Press,  
Northampton

Photo credits: Professional Sport,  
Richard Sowersby and Melanie Friend  
by kind permission of Breast Cancer Care

The Sports Council was incorporated by Royal Charter in 1972. Its main objectives are to increase participation in sport and physical recreation, to increase the quality and quantity of sports facilities, to raise standards of performance, and to provide information about sport.





