

Experiences, barriers, and facilitators to participating in physical activity and exercise in adults living with chronic pain: a qualitative study

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Abstract

Purpose: To explore experiences, barriers, and facilitators to participating in physical activity and exercise in adults living with chronic pain.

Materials and methods: An interpretive description qualitative study using semi-structured interviews was conducted. Participants included adults living with chronic pain (pain >3 months in duration). Transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results: Sixteen participants (five men; 11 women) with a median age of 53 years (range: 28-87) were interviewed. Three major themes related to physical activity and exercise in adults living with chronic pain were conceptualized by the researchers: the challenge of staying active (decreased activity levels, discomfort during physical activity, and uncertain and fluctuating abilities); diverse factors influence participation (pain, fatigue, perceived risks, beliefs about physical activity, competing demands, social support, motivation, other health conditions, and access to supports for physical activity or exercise); and perceived outcomes (pain management, functional improvements, social participation, mental health, and overall well-being).

Conclusions: Participating in physical activity and exercise was a challenge for adults living with chronic pain, whereby participation was influenced by multiple factors. Rehabilitation providers should aim to reduce modifiable barriers to physical activity and exercise for adults living with chronic pain, with the goal of improving health outcomes for this population. Implications for rehabilitation Despite the perceived benefits, participation in physical activity and exercise is a challenge for adults living with chronic pain. Diverse factors can influence participation in physical activity and exercise from the perspective of adults living with chronic pain. Rehabilitation providers should aim to reduce modifiable barriers to physical activity and exercise for adults living with chronic pain. Results can be used to inform future person-oriented physical activity and exercise interventions for adults living with chronic pain.

Keywords: Physical activity; chronic pain; exercise; qualitative research; rehabilitation.