It’s been life changing: perceived benefits of participation in the ‘Live Active’ exercise referral scheme

Prior, F, Coffey, M, Robins, A and Cook, PA

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Exercise referral schemes (ERSs) aim to increase the physical activity levels and health outcomes of people with chronic health conditions.

Participants experience a wide range of benefits, which quantitative evaluations do not typically measure. Future evaluations should consider using methods that capture the full spectrum of potential benefits for a more representative evaluation of impact.

Participants report benefits such as:
- Physical Health: Improved lung function, blood pressure, blood glucose, pain, and mobility.
- Physical Activity: Increased physical activity knowledge, improved health, and better fitness.
- Mental Health: Improved mental health, activity as an escape, and it's my refuge now.
- Social Health: Improved socialisation, being active together outside of the ERS, and being around similar people.
- Adjunct Benefits: Improved confidence, improved diet, influenced others to be active, improved independence, medication stopped, operation no longer needed, cognitive health, enjoyment, quality of life, sense of purpose, return to work, an alternative to medication, and improved mental health.

Semi-structured interviews with 30 participants who had completed a 6-month ERS framework analysis themes:
- Efficacy inconclusive: How has participation been beneficial for you?
- Becoming active: I didn't carry on for the rest of my life.
- Becoming active: I wouldn't be active if not referred.
- Becoming active: I'm gonna carry this on for the rest of my life.

Conclusions:
- Participants experience a wide range of benefits, which quantitative evaluations do not typically measure. Future evaluations should consider using methods that capture the full spectrum of potential benefits for a more representative evaluation of impact.

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