

Building Muscle and an Endurance Program



FRANCESCA FISHER

A big part of being physically active for lower cancer risk is having enough strength. One growing and affordable program to help aging adults stay strong and active is Geri-Fit®.

IN 1994, Francesca Fisher, CEO and the program developer of Geri-Fit®, launched her dream: an older adults' exercise program that could provide body building, endurance training and flexibility training for older adults.

"Our program is devoted to building and maintaining the muscle that nature takes away," Fisher says. "After age 70, we lose 2 pounds of muscle per year. We need to build and protect as much precious muscle as possible because of the aging process."

Reaching More People in Rural Areas

First, Fisher started with just four locations in her home state of Ohio. Now it's up and running in 33 states. In 2018 alone, Geri-Fit® added more than 50 locations, for a total of 256 throughout the United States. All classes are very low-cost or free.

In rural areas that may not have senior centers, Fisher has been distributing the program as a DVD to community libraries that agree to show it for senior fitness classes. Classes are also available to libraries with high-speed internet access.

Chronic disease self-management is an important element of the program, Fisher says. "Geri-Fit® provides a large amount of

the 150 minute minimum weekly requirement for physical activity to help manage chronic disease. We have a lot of cancer survivors, because they realize that exercise is going to help their mood, physical wellness and other conditions."

Making Progress from Day 1

The goal of the Geri-Fit® program is for older adults to be able to stand up easily from a seated position. Participants are evaluated first to determine their levels and advised to check with their

health-care providers before beginning Geri-Fit®.

The classes, usually held for 12 weeks, teach the correct way to lift weights safely. Beginners start with 2- or 3-pound weights. As they progress, students may use a set of heavier weights for muscles that have become stronger.

The instructors that teach Geri-Fit® are trained by a unique online system so that they can teach older adults how to safely lift weights.

Although it is not billed as "aerobics," participants keep marching in place or step from side to side between sets to keep their heart rates steady. This provides endurance training, Fisher says.

An Outstanding Instructor

Geri-Fit® instructors are recruited by the senior centers in their areas or library staff can become Geri-Fit® instructors. One remarkable example is Mary Konicki, whose Geri-Fit® classes at the Hanover County Senior Resource Center in North Carolina are extremely popular.

"We've had several people who have come in with walkers who are now using canes and not the walkers after doing the program," Mary says.

She used to volunteer at various gyms, then trained in the Geri-Fit® program through the Geri-Fit Company, LLC.

"I repeat the instructions to keep their back straight, head up and stomach in. We always do exercises standing or sitting, never on the floor. Cancer survivors in our program can lift the 1- or 2-pound weights just fine."

She adds, "I've gotten comments like, 'Why didn't I find your class before this?' and 'I feel mentally better' and 'I'm able to bend where I couldn't before'."

To find a class near you or online, visit <https://www.gerifit.com>.

GERI-FIT®