



University of
Lethbridge

NEWS RELEASE

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U of L researcher examining ways to increase daily movement among older adults in assisted-living residences

Some people might look forward to the time when they don't have to shop, cook and clean house, but it turns out those activities actually support healthy aging.

"When you take those kinds of activities away, people have no reason to get up and move," says Dr. Jennifer Copeland, a University of Lethbridge kinesiology professor. "A lot of the ways most of us get some daily movement around the house, even now during the COVID-19 pandemic, is because we have to cook supper, do the dishes, get groceries and do basic domestic chores."



Copeland conducts research into healthy aging and, thanks to a Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Catalyst Grant worth \$91,000, she and a team of researchers will turn their attention to finding ways older adults in assisted living can increase their daily movement.

A small pilot study completed at assisted-living residences in Lethbridge showed benefits in residents' balance, leg strength and gait speed six weeks after researchers introduced the program. The program consisted of simple interventions, including an education session for residents and staff about the benefits of sitting less and ways to add more movement into daily activities. Standing tables were placed in lounges to encourage residents to stand while having coffee and signs encouraging movement were placed at strategic locations. For example, one sign was placed by the television to remind people to stand up and stretch during commercial breaks. An on-site ambassador encouraged residents to stand up and go for a walk. The researchers used inclinometers, small wearable devices, to measure time spent standing, walking and sitting before and after the program.

"The goal was to make an intervention that's really simple and wouldn't require a staff member, a lot of resources and money," says Copeland. "Really, it's just about shifting habits."

Based on the successful results of the pilot study, Copeland and researchers in Ontario and New Brunswick now want to test the intervention on a larger scale. In addition, Alberta's Strategic Clinical Networks and the Brenda Strafford Foundation in Calgary, which focuses on seniors' care, are partners in the research project.

"The effectiveness of the program will be determined by measuring residents' actual sitting time before and after the program is implemented," says Copeland. "We will also interview residents, their families and staff to see how people feel about the strategies and how to ensure they work well for everyone."

Because of the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the research team won't be able to start the research this spring as originally planned. Most funding agencies are providing an extension because of the situation, so preparatory work will be done this summer in the hopes they can implement the program and collect data in a year's time.

"For now, we will complete the first phase and develop a tool kit," Copeland says. "We can give those to staff to try out. Given the pandemic restrictions, it might be really beneficial for them to have some ideas on how to incorporate movement throughout the day, given they can't have visitors or go on outings."

This news release can be found online at [UNews](#).

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