

## *Program 07*

### **Too Old To Be Unfit**

*How exercise can have major benefits for older males – especially during and after prostate treatments*

In this program, the focus is on the importance for older men able to engage in appropriate exercise – no matter their age, and then on the role that structured exercise programs can have for many older men who are diagnosed with prostate cancer.

Recorded with input from two researchers, at the Australian Catholic University in Sydney and at Edith Cowan University in Perth, and with additional input from two exercise program participants, this program looks closely at the possible effects on men's health and wellbeing, including sexual wellbeing, by participating in exercise programs offered through these two universities, for men during and after treatment for prostate cancer.

The production team especially thanks Lee and John for their openness in discussing aspects of their sexual wellbeing as a result of participation in the exercise program at Edith Cowan University Health and Wellness Institute in Perth.

#### **Interviewees**

Dr Michael Baker

Dr Prue Cormie

#### **Discussion Starter**

There is no denying that the ravages of time usually take their toll on older men, weakening their physical capacities and encouraging the idea so readily reinforced by our culture that the best they can do is put up with 'getting old' supported by whatever medicine can help ameliorate the experience. But new evidence suggests we've all got it wrong – especially younger people apt to telling older relatives not to 'overdo it' physically – a common refrain of a youth obsessed culture that is simply not in touch with the facts of the matter.

Rather than being wrapped in cotton wool and kept safe from 'overdoing it', there is now ample evidence to suggest that the exact opposite is what older men ought to do. Even men in their late 80s and 90s can benefit from everyday exercise; better still if it takes a form they can enjoy. Excess body fat can be shed, muscles and bones given a new lease of life, and many other health benefits achieved, allowing improved mobility and staying in the mainstream of life, rather than being relegated to the 'back bench' of fragility or incapacity.

Exercise can even help mitigate the nasty after effects of some medical treatments, for example, treatment for prostate cancer; it has a whole lot going for it, and with sound professional advice is usually quite safe, even for the oldest of men. That said, it is no easy thing after a bout of serious illness, to trust one's body again. And with so many external messages 'rubbing it in' about old age and dilapidation, regaining physical confidence isn't easy.

But with a steady and modest start, and a bit of old fashioned pluck, it is still something that is achievable – and all the more so with the support of family and friends. Simple exercise may yet pave the way for a radical improvement in the health and wellbeing of ageing males.

#### **Questions**

1. *Much talk in recent times deploring ageism, seems not to have done much to substantially change our cultural view of ageing or how we tend to frame the*

*status and worth of older citizens. What might be some affirmative strategies capable of effecting this change?*

2. *What are some of the factors at play in our culture, in families, and in workplaces that serve to perpetuate a less than positive view and attitude concerning male ageing?*
3. *What kind of strategies and policies could government and private health sectors adopt to encourage older males to engage in forms of physical activity and exercise that could appreciably change their health and functional status?*

**Project Consultant**

*Dr John Ashfield*