

Tips for Virtual Exercise Programs



These tips will help you support the safe and enjoyable inclusion of people living with dementia in virtual exercise programs:

If possible, have an **introductory session with the participant** to orient them to the virtual program and assess their experience with exercise, fitness levels, and any health conditions or injuries.



- Orientation to the virtual space can also be accomplished in the group, if needed. Give everyone a **tip sheet** for camera positioning, how to pin the instructor to the screen, and how to turn the microphone on and off.
- **Basic elements of fitness can be assessed with simple moves** such as chair stands and balance stance tests either one-on-one or in the group in early sessions.
- **Health conditions or injuries may be reported on an intake form** if one-on-one meetings are not possible. Be aware of any risk factors and have participants get medical clearance, if needed.



Help participants **select a safe space to exercise**. They should have enough room to move. Ideally, the surface would be hard, non-slippery, and clutter-free. The space would be distraction-free and low noise with sufficient lighting.



Have participants **keep a sturdy chair or other support** (e.g., table, wall, etc.) nearby for balance.



Encourage participants to **join the class a few minutes early and stay longer after** the class ends to foster social connection. Facilitate social engagement and discussion. This could involve bringing up current events in your community or even having a joke of the day.



If possible, have a second instructor or experienced volunteer. They can help demonstrate different levels of difficulty for each exercise. They can also take people who need a little extra help to a breakout room to help them with movements. They can also be an important resource for trouble-shooting technology or emergencies.



Encourage participants to stay on-screen during the exercise program.



Participants should be instructed to continue marching at a low intensity to gradually bring their heart rate back to resting level if they get disconnected. A volunteer or staff should contact them to help troubleshoot, make sure they are safe, and/or talk them through a safe cool down.



Have an emergency plan and share this with staff, volunteers, and participants so everyone is aware. Make a few reminders before each exercise session (as you typically would in person), including some of the tips listed above.



Have participants keep a phone within reach in case of emergencies. Instruct the participants to let you know if they are leaving the class or choosing to go off-screen for any reason so that you know they are safe. If possible, have a volunteer or a staff to check in with them promptly if they forget to do so.



Educate participants on how to recognize unusual signs and symptoms that suggest they should take a break such as nausea, difficulty breathing, chest pain, dizziness, or new or worsening pain. If any of these symptoms are recognized by a participant, they should stop exercising immediately and inform the instructor.