

# Disc golf, balloon badminton: Adapted sports keep seniors active

Activities cater to people of differing abilities, including wheelchair users

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A year ago, 75-year-old Mr Pak Chang Mung could not walk without a walking aid, and mostly got around on a wheelchair because he said his legs were weak.

Plagued by his mobility issues, he spent his days cooped up in his Pasir Ris flat with his wife.

Now, the retired tailor plays sports twice a week with other seniors at the active ageing centre near his home.

The group gathers for disc golf, which is normally played standing up with a frisbee. For Mr Pak and the other seniors, they sit down and toss plastic ring to one another, and everyone then takes turns shooting the ring into a basket. Laughter and applause fill the space whenever someone scores.

Over the past year, playing sports adapted for seniors has improved Mr Pak's fitness. He now makes the 10-minute walk to the active ageing centre by himself without a walking aid, a stark difference from being wheeled there by his helper just eight months ago.

With an ageing population in Singapore, there has been an increase in the number of elderly folk with mobility issues.

According to the Singapore Department of Statistics, the number of residents in resident households aged 65 and over with mobility issues grew from around 25,500 to 50,000 between 2000 and 2020.

Modified sports are suitable for seniors with different physical or cognitive abilities, and also help improve their physical, mental and emotional well-being, said Mr Shawn Lim, division head at Sport Singapore's philanthropic arm, SportCares.

Ms Heidi Rafman, chief of the



Mr Pak Chang Mung (in orange top) playing an adapted version of disc golf at the void deck of Block 212 Pasir Ris Street 21 on Jan 23. Playing such sports has improved the fitness of the retired tailor, who now makes the 10-minute walk to the active ageing centre near his home by himself without a walking aid, a stark difference from being wheeled there by his helper just eight months ago. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

healthy ageing department at the Agency for Integrated Care, told The Straits Times that since 2022, almost 200 community care staff and volunteers from more than 60 organisations have been trained to conduct adaptive sport sessions.

The agency partnered SportCares in 2020 to develop a guide on adapting sports like floorball and disc golf into versions that seniors can easily play to keep active.

The activities are divided into categories for differing abilities, from those who use a wheelchair to those with relatively good mobility.

The Fit and Fun Adaptive Sports Toolkit provides step-by-step instructions, instructional video clips and facilitation tips to make

sports more suitable for the elderly and other community groups with differing abilities.

The guide's alternative version of floorball marks out a narrow space and positions players who are wheelchair users on its perimeters so that they can hit the ball without needing to move around.

It also suggests that volleyball be played with a soft inflatable beach ball, and badminton be played with balloons, so seniors would not need to over-exert themselves.

Among the active ageing centres that have organised adaptive sports is Methodist Welfare Services (MWS) Active Ageing Centre - Golden Lily@Pasir Ris.

It sees an average turnout of 12 seniors per session, where partici-

pants like Mr Pak play senior-friendly versions of games like disc golf and basketball.

MWS programme development manager Brendon Yam said the centre introduced adaptive sports to its seniors in January 2022 with an adapted game of balloon badminton.

"A lot of the seniors would have played badminton earlier on in their lives, or at least know about it, so we thought it is a good sport (for an introduction) that has a low barrier to entry," he said.

Once the seniors are comfortable with familiar sports, they are introduced to new games, like bocce, to engage them cognitively and allow them to learn new skills.

"It's interesting to see how far we

can actually use adaptive sports and bring it to the community to engage the frail, and also those who are well," Mr Yam said.

SportCares' Mr Lim said that the organisation also engages community care partners to see how the needs of seniors can be better supported through its CareMasters Funding. The funding has helped staff and volunteers introduce simplified fitness activities for seniors, such as morning exercises using elastic bands, to improve their readiness to participate in sports.

Since June 2022, close to 300 seniors from seven active ageing centres have joined these exercises each week. Each session of weekly morning exercise attracts more than 40 seniors.

Mr Lim added that sports can also build social bonds.

Madam Sakyah Sapari, 74, has been attending the weekly sports sessions in Pasir Ris for around eight months. The housewife has knee problems and travels around on a motorised scooter, but wanted to exercise regularly in the hope of improving her condition.

Though her main goal is to get fitter, the sessions have also helped her make friends. She mostly kept to herself in the past. She said: "Having friends here makes things fun. I haven't been able to walk properly for a long time... Though the games are simple, I feel myself getting a bit stronger."

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