

On Agility Training in the Older Adult Population

Absolutely, agility training is valuable to older adults. Of course, as with other acute variables of training, "performance" is relative to the individuals/demographics—there is no expectation one would train older adults for the football combines.

Agility and visual training help older adults (and people of all ages) to react to possible collisions and obstacles (e.g. children running all over, cars with inattentive drivers, buses, balls, cyclists, skateboarders, etc.). Reed-Jones, Dorgo, Hitchings, and Bader (2012) define available reaction time (ART) as the "amount of time available from obstacle detection to collision" (p. 585). During the period of ART, the central nervous system has to process visual information and make adjustments which also involve execute function (EF) (Reed-Jones et al., 2012). Generally older adults' reaction time increases with aging and therefore, the risk increases for "an unfortunate event" with collisions/obstacles (Reed-Jones et al., 2012).

Agility and visual training as part of a comprehensive (muscle strengthening, balance, proprioceptive/postural exercises, and cognitive challenges) falls-risk reduction program would be extremely valuable. Visual training (e.g. via use of video games) would help older adults sharpen their cognitive abilities, visual processing, attention and other areas of execute control required to prioritize and make decisions regarding the probability of collision/avoidance (Reed-Jones et al., 2012). Agility would help older adults navigate built obstacles (e.g. speed bumps, uneven sidewalks, trash left in the walking path, etc.) (Reed-Jones et al., 2012). Older adults were found to have the most trouble going around obstacles, turning a full 360 degrees, picking something up from the floor, climbing (up/down) stairs, and keeping balance on "uneven" surfaces such as foam pad/beam (Reed-Jones et al., 2012).

Cone drills, walking patterns (e.g. box, figure-8's), and ladders (painted or taped ladder-pattern on the ground as opposed to a physical agility ladder to avoid tripping) are just some of the ways to make exercising more fun for older adults and all age groups. Some researchers have also experimented with tai chi, line-dancing, and various forms of dancing in general. Some older adults may be more familiar with ballroom type of dancing that may have been prevalent in their earlier years. There are a lot of possibilities to get creative and be productive.

References

Reed-Jones, R. J., Dorgo, S., Hitchings, M. K., & Bader, J. O. (2012). Vision and agility training in community dwelling older adults: Incorporating visual training into programs for fall prevention. *Gait & Posture*, 35(4), 585-589.