

Exploring the impact of an outdoor exercise and recreational walking program among people with acquired brain injuries

J. R. Postnikoff, T. D. Hopper, C.S. Mang

Faculty Of Kinesiology and Health Studies, University of Regina

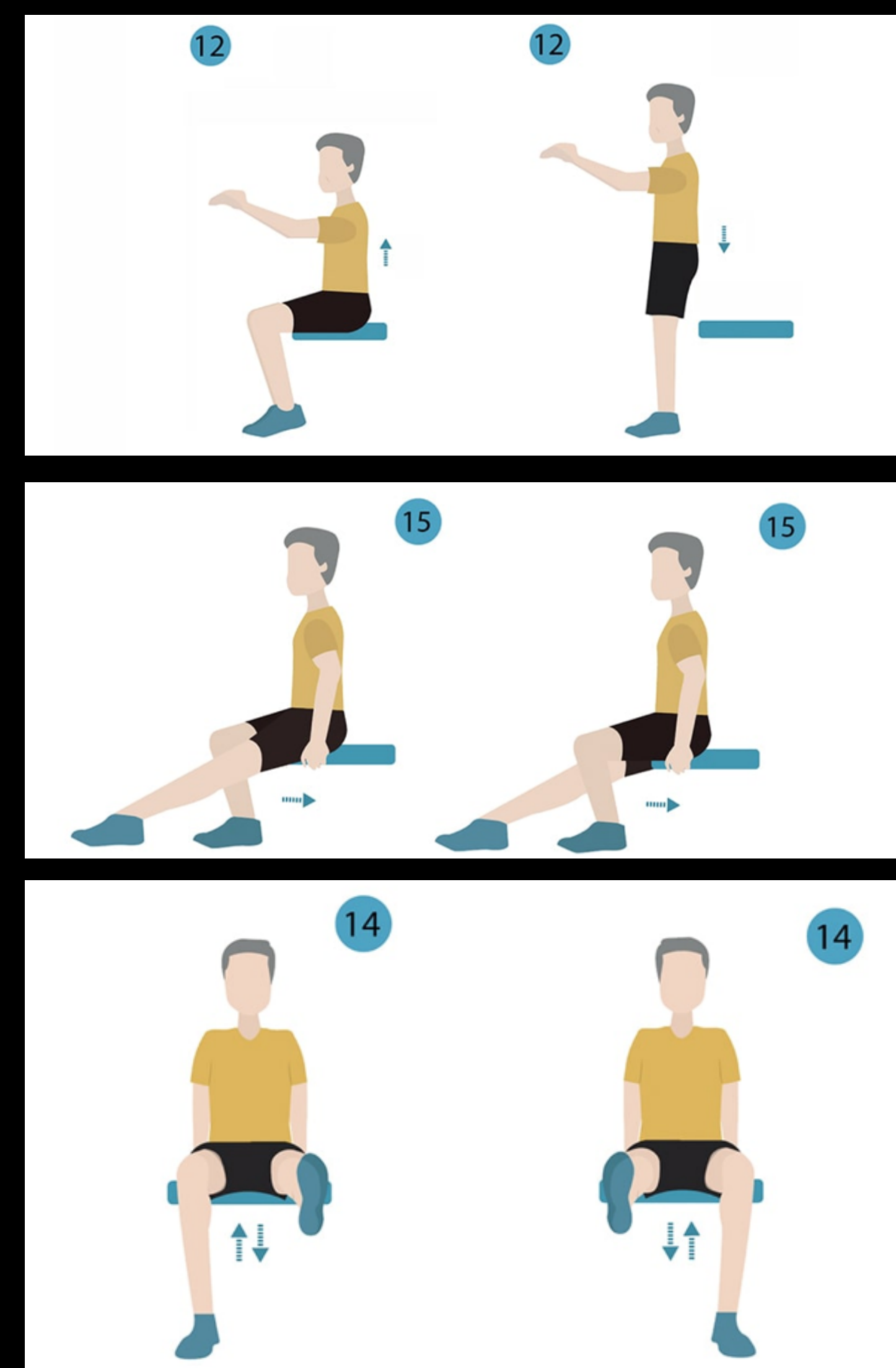


Introduction

- People with acquired brain injuries (ABIs) often report that their post-injury rehabilitation ended too early
- Currently, there are few affordable, community-based exercise and recreation programs targeted to people with ABIs in Saskatchewan
- The Brain Power Hour Program was offered in the summer of 2021 to members of the Saskatchewan Brain Injury Association (SBIA) to address the need for such programs in SK while integrating its delivery with research

Methods

- Adult members of SBIA registered for the "Brain Power Hour" exercise and walking program
- Program sessions were free and held in outdoor locations in Regina, Saskatoon, and Moosejaw between June-August 2021
- 1 hr group exercise (morning) and walking (afternoon) sessions were offered Tuesday to Friday with up to 5 participants per session
- Exercise sessions included strength, core/balance, and cardiorespiratory elements
- Walking sessions involved walking in parks and socializing
- Participants were assessed at multiple time points using the Short Physical Performance Battery tool as part of program delivery
- A Program Facilitator Manual was created to establish consistent delivery across cities
- An embedded researcher co-facilitated sessions in Regina and conducted "go-along" interviews with Regina-based participants
- SBIA program facilitators recorded field notes describing notable experiences and reflections related to the program



Conclusion

Preliminary findings suggest that many individuals with an acquired brain injury stand to benefit from targeted wellness programming in the community for both recreational and rehabilitation purposes. Potential social and physical benefits may be linked, and together contribute to improvements in wellness. Knowledge generated through the experience of delivering this program has already been applied by SBIA to continue with an indoor, Saskatoon-based program.

Findings

- Across Saskatchewan, 22 program participants consented to the present study
- Program participants' time since injury ranged from 1-26 years and mobility ranged from those using wheelchairs to those walking without assistance
- Participants attended 1-4 sessions per week
- A total of 12 participants were interviewed on 1-2 occasions

Physical Improvements

- Some participants who came regularly to the program reported that they physically improved in their strength, balance and endurance throughout the program.
- Majority of the participants were motivated to improve physically to increase mobility and prevent health conditions.
- Several participants reported that they repeated the exercises learnt at the program in the evenings and on the weekends.

"I'm about twice as strong as I was when I started the program".

Benefits of Social Supports

- A few participants explicitly and implicitly expressed that meeting new people and the facilitators were their favourite part of the program.
- Many participants indicated that they feel unsafe exercising alone, the support provided in Brain Power Hour provided individuals with a safe environment to exercise in.
- Brain Power Hour provided a setting for brain injury survivors to experience a sense of belonging.

"... together is good because I can't go by myself. So it's very, very good to go together".

COVID-19 Impacts

- Almost all interviewed participants stated that they felt bored or isolated prior to participating in the Brain Power Hour program.
- One individual who experienced a second stroke during the COVID-19 pandemic noted that he received markedly less post-stroke rehabilitation relative to a prior pre-pandemic stroke.
- It was reported that having the program located outside made it "lessen the worry of COVID".

"I just needed to get out of the house and find somethin' to do because I can't volunteer right now".

