

# Moving forwards; **Move More, More Often** **Our Stories**

Annual Report of the Director of Public Health  
for Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan 2018



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With thanks to Holly Muller for developing these stories  
Stories edited by Kate Roberts and Susan Toner



# Welcome to our Stories



*Bashiir*



*Megan*



*Kasia*



*Kumar*



*Edwin*



*Wynn*

All of us benefit from being active. It can be fun, sociable and a reason for meeting up with family and friends. It helps us to feel good and lifts our mood; it can relieve stress; helps us maintain a healthy weight and is good for our physical health. And it doesn't have to cost anything.

We know that being active at home, at school, in the workplace and within our local community makes a difference. And how the areas where we live, play and work are designed and managed can also help us be more active. Being able to walk to places, moving easily around our local community, accessing locally available services and facilities all help. Support being offered through our schools, workplaces, health services and councils to encourage us all to be active also helps us. Groups that provide both a social and a physical activity element can support us to be more active together with encouragement from the professionals that we come into contact with. Positive messages through social media and campaigns can help motivate us and keep us going when we feel like giving up.

These stories, told by the people themselves, show some of the barriers people can face to becoming more active at different stages of our lives. They also highlight some of the key elements which support us all to be more active; healthy places and spaces, encouraging play, increasing walking and cycling, and the importance of social interaction. They illustrate how being more active can benefit us at all ages and the positive impact it can have on not just our physical health but also on our mood, our confidence and on our stress levels.

I hope you enjoy reading these stories and that they encourage you to think about what you can do individually, and in your job role to get us all to move more, more often.



Find the rest of the report including main report, infographics and video case studies. All available on our website: <http://bit.ly/2J6VgIM>



Fiona Kinghorn  
Executive Director of Public Health  
Cardiff and Vale University Health Board





# *Bashiir*

When Mum drives me to school, I stare out the window and imagine myself swinging from lamppost to lamppost, like some kind of super hero. My arms are strong and thick and stretch like elastic bands. That's my superpower, being incredibly stretchy, strong and fit and not being scared of heights at all. I'm called something like Stretchy Man, or Elasto Man. I'm not sure which. I think probably Elasto Man.

I do the same on the way back from school. I guess I'm glad I get collected and don't do any of the after-school football or rugby or athletics stuff. Mum says she hated P.E. at school too, and was never on the team for anything.

I finish my white chocolate buttons just as we get home; they are my favourite type of chocolate and I eat at least three packets a day, which I buy with my pocket money.

I'm looking forward to watching TV with Mum and Dad when we get home, tucked up on the sofa in a row. Family time, Mum calls it. We do it every night. 'Go inside, Bashiir,' Mum says, once we've parked and got out onto the pavement. The traffic roars as we unlock the door and go in. It's too dangerous outside to do any playing, so I don't. I just play in the house. I sometimes wish we had a garden.

Reduce screen time



I'm quite fat. I know that I am. When I walk up the stairs, I go sweaty and out of breath and have to puff on my inhaler. If I try to run, my belly wobbles all over the place, which is really embarrassing. I feel pretty left out at break times. Usually, I sit on the wall by the flower border. I don't really play with the other kids or do sports, because I've got asthma and because of my fat stomach, which I can't fit in my school trousers properly; I can hardly do them up. When the other kids are playing football or tag, I sometimes would like to join in. Mostly, I sit at the side during P.E. as well, sneaking chocolate buttons from my bag. I wish I wasn't so fat and that I could breathe better. It's just the way I am, I suppose. Mum and Dad say I should lose some weight because they're worried I'll get unhealthy if I don't. I should exercise more, Mum says. But I'm so rubbish at anything like that. I wish I was Elasto Man, for real.

The school holidays were good. I got some nice presents when my relatives came to visit, including new computer games, which I've nearly completed already. I got lots of sweets and chocolates from Ayeeyo.



Also, I drew a picture of myself as Elasto Man and Mum and Dad stuck it on the fridge, which made me feel quite proud. There's a new thing happening at school this term called The Daily Mile. It's all right, actually, even though I hated it at first and didn't want to do it. I was scared of having an asthma attack because you have to run for 15 minutes, and of not being able to keep up with everyone. But it's not so bad; the teachers let me start at my own pace and build up till I could run the whole fifteen. I've got much better at running because of it. I'm also part of this thing called The Walking Bus. My asthma nurse said the extra moving was helping, so my parents let me join the Walking Bus. What it is, we all walk to school together, all the kids, pretending to be a bus, with bus stops where we pick people up. It's funny. There's time to chat and I've made a couple of friends who live on my street. They're called Tom and Kooshin. I think I'm getting better at football. Me and Tom and Kooshin made a goal in the street down the side of our houses, which has now got no traffic on it because it was blocked off to let kids play on it. I love it, actually, playing in the street. I think computer games are awesome, but I also like playing real games with Tom and Kooshin.



Today, at school, I got chosen for this football match we did in P.E. and I was in midfield and I set up a goal for Jack, one of the best footballers in my class. Afterwards, he said I wasn't too bad at football, and I was pleased he noticed. It's true I'm getting fitter and less wobbly, which means I can run better, and I've been practising with Tom and Kooshin quite a bit. Anyway, I found it fun, for P.E. Later, I might show my new step over trick to Tom and Kooshin. When I told Mum, she said she's proud of me, which she always says, but this time she was crying a bit. I think she's relieved. Dad has bought me a bike, which is black and red, and my sister got one that is pale purple. On Saturday we're going on the mountain bike trail up in the forestry. Him and mum are going to walk whilst we go up and down the hills. Dad says we're going to do stuff like that a lot more at weekends because it'll do us all good to be more active. I'm looking forward to going out together.

Basically, I'm glad I'm less wheezy and don't need my pump as much these days, and I'm not quite so fat. It's still hard sometimes doing P.E., but it's not so bad. I might not be super strong with elastic arms, like Elasto Man, but I don't mind being me anymore. I'm not so bad. I might even be pretty happy.



Bashiir's story highlights the challenges faced by children who are already overweight and the kind of initiatives that can help them get active

**The key messages from Bashiir's story are:**

- For parents:
  - Encourage children to sit less and move more, being active for at least 60 minutes every day, this can be done in short bursts to make up the hour
  - Encourage children to walk to school and to play outside
  - Visit parks and open spaces; enjoy family time outdoors
  - Reduce screen time
- For schools:
  - Implement interventions that support children be more active, for example, the Daily Mile, the Walking Bus
- For local authorities:
  - Facilitate street closures for play to encourage play and demonstrate its benefits
  - Reduce traffic speed in residential areas



# Megan

If I had a pound for all the times I wished I was someone else, I'd be a billionaire. I'm thinking it now as I put my school dinner tray back on the trolley and follow Tanya to the loos. I ate all the pudding again, even though I swore I wouldn't. I'm a right pig, that's my problem.

We go into the loos. 'Look at that,' I say to Tanya, who's next to me in front of the mirrors doing her mascara. I pinch the fat at my waist, a small wodge between finger and thumb. Tanya glances then shrugs. I sigh and get out my hairbrush. It's P.E. next but I'm not going. It's too embarrassing. I don't have any of the right kit, the school uniform shorts make me look the size of a whale, and I feel so gross compared to the sporty girls with long legs who don't seem to sweat. I'm drenched within a minute, like I've been in the shower, and my face goes as red as a tomato. I'll stay here in the toilets, or go to one of the empty science labs and play a game on my phone.

'I'm not bothering with P.E.,' I say, trying to get my hair into a neater ponytail.

Tanya tuts. 'You never go anymore.' She thinks I'm lazy. She never pulls a sickie or anything like that. 'I'm always last at everything, so what's the point.' I move around in slow motion in front of the sinks, doing a snail impression. Tanya snorts. I'm willing her to say something like, 'Shut up!'

You're no way the slowest.' But she doesn't. She rolls her eyes. 'Suit yourself,' she says, and walks out with her bag slung over her shoulder.

I really, really, really hate my body. I don't think I can explain how gross it is. It's just wrong; I'm wrong. Tonight, I caught a glimpse of myself when I was getting changed into my pyjamas – it made me feel so terrible. I felt kind of angry, then I burst into tears. I get really down and just wish I looked different. I know I should be doing sports or working out, or something to improve how I look, but I can't. I'm just no good at it. I don't fit in. I get so out of breath, and I'm too slow or not confident enough. Tomorrow, I'll stop at Boots and get some new lipstick. That usually makes me feel better, for about five seconds.

At school this week, there've been some people called Sport Cardiff coming round classes and talking about physical activity. They said they work with the local community to provide more different types of activities and sports to school kids. They're doing these girls-only fitness classes, which Tanya reckons she's definitely going to, so I think I might



go. I dunno. I hope I won't be totally useless. You get to try loads of different stuff – fitness stuff, sports and physical activities – so maybe I'll find something I'm actually OK at. There's some other free tasters we can do at the end of it, so that's good. And we can wear our own clothes instead of school P.E. kit. Tanya said we should wear leggings and a t-shirt. I'm going to wear my black ones, because they're slimming.

OK, so I went, and it wasn't that bad! It was kind of a laugh when I got into it. It was dead relaxed and people could choose which thing to do, so I did Boxercise, and Tanya did 'Street Dance', which she said was loads of fun, so I'm going to pick that next time. I wasn't the worst at Boxercise though. In fact, I was OK. It was way better than just the options at P.E. It was something different and I felt like I fitted in much better. I didn't mind getting red and sweaty somehow. After, I felt kind of light and bouncy, like my body was more awake. Then we had a wellbeing workshop where we spoke about how we felt about our bodies. I didn't realise other people felt bad about how they look. They always seem so confident! I kept remembering what Sport Cardiff said when they did that talk at school, about all the good results of doing exercise. I think they're definitely right.

I've been to the fitness classes and wellbeing workshops for four weeks and I'm feeling a lot better and proud of myself for going. Tanya and me are getting on really well, as well, because we're learning a dance routine together and she said I'm more fun than I've been in ages. It is fun, and I've started eating more healthy stuff, which is all part of getting better at the classes. Mum says I seem happier in myself and I've got my 'spark' back, which made me pleased. Me and Tanya signed up to the 'Couch to

5K' challenge today. We're going to do it together, and tomorrow we're going to buy special running water bottles that you can get in purple glitter with a nozzle to drink from. I know it's not important to have nice things, but they're really cool and I reckon we're going to look like people who go running a lot. I plan to go twice a week. I'm looking forward to it and I think I'm going to be OK because it turns out I'm not useless at exercise when I dare to try.

*'You're getting loads stronger.'*

That's what the person at the gym class told me.

I liked that: *stronger*. I reckon I'm going to keep trying then!

Megan's story highlights the challenges faced by young people, especially teenage girls, who may lack the confidence to participate in activities and worry about how they look.

**The key messages from Megan's story are:**

- For teenagers:
  - Be active for 60 minutes every day – you can do this in short bursts to make up the hour
- For schools:
  - Provide alternative physical activity classes/choices delivered by reputable agencies/organisations
  - Reconsider school uniform to include t-shirts and leggings as opposed to sports gear



# Kasia

When I flick through magazines, I often see pictures of pregnant celebrities with tiny bumps and perfect bodies who ‘snap back into shape’ after two weeks of giving birth. I wonder why I even read these magazines. It’s like I’m deliberately trying to make myself feel worse; my anxiety goes through the roof. I don’t look anything like that; I’ve put on so much weight since being pregnant. A lot more than the midwife says is healthy. They’re going to test me for gestational diabetes soon. Apparently, that can make you put on loads of weight. But I’m sure it isn’t that. It’s because I don’t do anything. I can’t seem to get myself up and out. All I want to do is lie around and binge-watch Netflix and eat ice cream. I tell my boyfriend, Mirek, the ice cream is because I’ve got a pregnancy craving, but really I eat it because I feel bad; low or anxious most of the time.

I know I should go out to groups, like local antenatal exercise classes or pregnancy yoga. I’d meet other mums-to-be, Mirek says, and then I might feel less alone. But every time I look up what’s on, or think about going, I feel anxious and picture myself galumphing around on a yoga mat like an elephant, or not knowing what to say to anybody and not making any friends. I wish some of my Polish friends, or even just someone from work, was pregnant. It’s too hard, meeting brand new people when I’m feeling like this. I’m not good at the small talk. The midwife said my

weight gain might make the labour harder. She was trying to explain why I should go and exercise, I think, but it just terrified me. What if I can't do it? Or what if something goes wrong? I don't want to hurt the baby.

My midwife has been really kind to me in the last few appointments. She said, 'Kasia, I can tell you are really struggling'. It started when I told her I feel very alone, and that I never seem to have the energy to get up off the sofa. I cried. Then we talked for a while about my wellbeing and lifestyle. She was very caring, so I felt OK being honest. At the next appointment, we talked more about my lifestyle – 'sedentary', apparently. She explained the benefits of keeping active and asked me what I thought about being more active and how I could fit it into my routine. I said probably evening classes would be best, so she suggested some local ante-natal exercise classes. 'I'll give it a try,' I said, feeling a bit nervous. 'Yes, well done,' she said. 'It will really help you to gain weight healthily rather than remain at risk of developing diabetes,' she said.

That scared me, hearing myself described as at risk of diabetes, but kind of in a good way, I suppose, because I thought *Now I've GOT to do something*. She was very supportive, and made me feel like I really could change.

So, this week I'm going to the Ante-natal Exercise class up at the leisure centre. I'm going to force myself to go on Tuesday after work, even if I feel exhausted or anxious. I can hear the midwife's encouraging voice in my head saying, 'A little bit at a time is enough for now. Any increase in activity will do you good.' Knowing she's there really makes a difference. Mirek thinks the classes are a great idea and has promised to cook me a healthy dinner to come home to so I can relax afterwards. It's made me feel much better to have his support.



I've done the Ante-natal Exercise class for a month now, and I'm so glad I started going. I feel much more positive. I've stopped gaining weight so quickly and I'm enjoying eating a bit better, too. I'm trying to avoid sugary snacks and have given up the ice cream – mostly! The other women at the class are friendly. We share our pregnancy horror stories in the changing rooms, about breaking wind by mistake, or one woman has varicose veins. We talk about scans and due dates and how we're all getting on. One day, we talked about why each of us chose to come to the class. I told them I'd put on a lot of weight and had been feeling low, so thought the class would help. I was quite self-conscious saying it, but one woman – Emily – immediately nodded and said she'd come for the same reasons. She'd had to force herself to be more sociable and to have a more healthy pregnancy. I felt less alone straightaway.

Sitting there, amongst all those women with bumps (much bigger than the ones I'd been torturing myself with in the magazines) I felt excited and part of something. Soon I'd be meeting my baby. I felt strong, more confident in my own skin, and suddenly I could picture myself managing the labour really well and being a good mum. I don't know why, but that feeling has stayed with me.



Emily and I swapped numbers and we're going to go for a coffee. She sent me a link to an interesting article about the benefits of exercise to physical and mental health during pregnancy. It was lovely to get a message from her. I might suggest we sign up to some antenatal classes together, or some pregnancy yoga. It'll be nice to share the journey with someone who really understands.

Kasia's story highlights the challenges faced by pregnant women in being active, identifies the role of midwives in promoting physical activity and demonstrates the support gained from being part of a group.

**The key messages from Kasia's story are:**

- For pregnant women:
  - Be active throughout your pregnancy, aiming for at least 150 mins of activity that makes you feel warmer and breathe a bit harder every week spread across the days e.g. brisk walking
  - Access ante-natal classes that encourage being active
- For health care professionals:
  - Make Every Contact Count and raise the issue of being active with pregnant women. Find out more here: <https://mecc.publichealthnetwork.cymru/en/>
- For local authorities / leisure centres:
  - Provide classes for pregnant women to be active and to socialise at local venues



*Kumar*

I mean, when do I get time to see my family, let alone exercise? My job is much more demanding since I got the promotion. The money's great, but I hardly have any spare time and, when I do, I just want to rest. Exercise comes last on my list of priorities. Weekends, I'm always exhausted or worrying about work, and if I haven't got something to catch up on ready for Monday, I put the sports channel on and try to persuade the children it's an interesting way to spend a Saturday afternoon. They'd rather go off and play though, so I'm mostly by myself, drowsing on the sofa, munching crisps and sipping on a much-needed beer.

It's ironic because I was very active as a younger man. Now, I'm a classic example of middle-aged spread. More to the point, my GP took my blood pressure and it was sky high; I'm at risk of type two diabetes, apparently, and various other horrible diseases: cancer, heart disease, dementia. It just doesn't seem real to me. I don't get time to stop and think, or to assess my situation. I'm too busy trying to keep up with my workload.

Dementia Friends came into work this week. I wonder if they knew in advance there'd be a room full of over-worked, middle-aged men with stress-induced sweats, their frantic hearts going like the clappers. Anyway, it was a welcome reminder. They did an informative talk about dementia

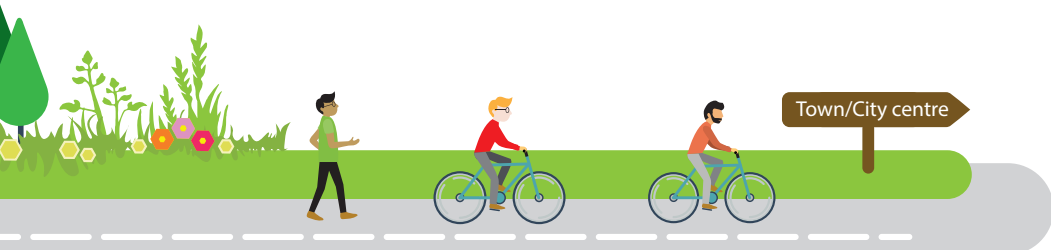
and how to be a dementia friendly community. They also mentioned that being more active can reduce your risk. There's change in the air; there's going to be a company-wide shift towards better working practices to safeguard the workforce. In other words, they're aiming to get us moving; doing walking meetings, lunchtime 'movement sessions', and some of my colleagues are promoting something called a 'walking month', where everyone is challenged to walk a certain amount of steps every day. Alan, on the desk next to mine, is going to try lunchtime zumba classes. I can't help laughing, thinking of him in lycra and dancing away, or whatever. He doesn't seem the type. Shows how much I chat to my colleagues: not much. I don't know how the heck I'm going to fit in doing any of this movement myself. I'm too stressed to even think about it properly.

I had a chat with the people from occupational health earlier this week. I suppose I'm starting to get worried about myself. My mood is all over the place – my wife, Adishree, tells me I'm a nightmare to be around half the time – and I'm full of aches and pains. My blood pressure has got even worse. I'm under a lot of stress; the occupational health person recognised that straightaway. I've not had a break for so long. I didn't realise how much it was affecting me. We had a chat about how active I am, or not, as it turns out. They weren't sniffy or finger wagging about it though; they just asked me a few leading questions and let me arrive at the conclusion myself.



I'm quite into this little wristband thing I got from Adishree for my birthday. It counts your steps. I've been tracking my steps on the App for a month. It's motivating because I get competitive with myself. I'm always trying to beat my step count from the day before. I've managed to do some walking every day for the walking month challenge at work. I walk to the office using some of the routes my colleagues gave out, which tend to avoid roads. I have to set off twenty minutes earlier and it's often a soggy, rainy experience, but I still prefer it to sitting in traffic getting all wound up. I've done the lunchtime movement group for three weeks, as well, and joined the workplace walking group, which is basically just short walks at lunchtime, but it's nice because it's sociable and breaks up the day. I've even done a couple of walking meetings and two park runs. I take the kids running on the weekends now and they love it. They moan at first but we always have fun. I admit I've felt a bit smug about how well I'm doing. I've done more steps than most of my colleagues.

Anyway, to sum up: with a bit of support, all the movement stuff at work, and taking more care to eat healthily, I've lost over a stone in two months. I've got more energy. I'm less stressed, my mood's better, and I'm just happier. A nicer person all round, says Adishree – more like the old me, and a better dad. The threat of diabetes isn't dangling over my head anymore either; the GP said my blood pressure is reducing to a



healthier level and my risk of diabetes and dementia has decreased. I didn't realise just how worried I'd been until I heard him say that. I felt so relieved. I'll be keeping on with the exercise, that's for sure; it's moved right up my list of priorities. I suppose I've realised what's really important in life; I want to enjoy my life, my family, my body. No job - no matter how well paid – is worth risking that.

Kumar's story highlights the challenges faced by working age men in being active, identifies the role of organisations and workplaces in supporting their staff to be more active and demonstrates the support that can be gained from being part of a group.

### **The key messages from Kumar's story are:**

- For working age adults:
  - Be active aiming for at least 150 mins of activity every week spread across the week e.g. sports, brisk walking, exercise classes
  - Walk or cycle to work
  - Be active in the outdoors in countryside, parks and nature
- For organisations and workplaces:
  - Encourage staff to be active throughout the working day by supporting walking meetings, engagement in campaigns, providing sessions, getting up and about for a break in long meetings
  - For health care professionals:
    - Make Every Contact Count and raise the issue of being active with patients. For more information visit <https://mecc.publichealthnetwork.cymru/en/>



# Edwin

My doctor said I was at risk of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) just before I retired. My breathing has been getting worse and every time I got a cold it turned into a chest infection. I'd planned a nice retirement party, but being ill completely spoiled it and made the whole thing feel depressing. It was like now I was stopping work because I was too old and clapped out to keep going, rather than because I'd earned it and deserved to go off and enjoy myself.

I've been unwell ever since. My wife says I have to stop smoking, because it'll make my breathing problems a lot worse. But I've smoked so many years, there's not much chance I'll be able to stop now. I've tried before and couldn't. Anyway, having a smoke is one of the only good things I've got. I'm struggling to get up and down my own stairs; I've had three chest infections in four months, a terrible cough that won't go away, and seem to be wheezing more and more. Sometimes I wake in the night and can't catch my breath. Retirement isn't the relaxing time I'd always pictured, with trips to the seaside and playing with the grandkids; it's an uphill struggle at the moment. In fact, I preferred being in work. At least I had something to do and felt useful. Now I just sit in the house, smoking and watching TV. But what else can I do? Walking anywhere makes me wheeze till I have a coughing fit. I get tired very quickly.

According to the doctor, I've got high blood pressure now, as well. I probably did all along. I just couldn't bring myself to go to the GP again for ages. Who wants more bad news? But I'm glad I did go. My wife came with me, which was nice of her. We went for a cuppa afterwards at the nearby café, and I told her I'd been referred to Help Me Quit because of my smoking. She got all tearful and was very relieved, and I held her hand and promised I'd definitely stop smoking. I hated seeing her upset, so I've vowed to myself I will try my best.

The Help Me Quit advisor is brilliant at their job, I've got to say. I don't feel judged at all and they gave me some great tips on how to get through cravings. So far, I've managed to stay off the fags, with the help of some patches and mouth spray. It's hard, mind you – it's such an old habit and I miss it every day. But I feel good about quitting. The GP was pleased too and congratulated me. He asked how I felt about trying to get more active now to improve my health even more. I said I didn't even know where to start and he suggested a scheme called the National Exercise Referral Scheme, where I attend exercise classes at my local gym to improve my fitness but would be supervised. I'm considering it. I mean, it can't hurt, can it? And what else have I got to do? It'll keep my mind off smoking, anyway. We chatted some more about my lifestyle – we both agreed something needs to change. I said I'd give the exercise a shot, so he's sent the referral off. Now I'm waiting to hear about starting the classes. I was so pleased because my breathing has been getting better already, as a direct result of giving up smoking. I can't believe how quickly that's made a difference. I feel a bit stupid for not having quit sooner, but also, it's better late than never.



The exercise classes are up at the leisure centre in the gym. There are so many different machines up there. It's quite fun learning how to work different muscles, and I don't mind the bikes and the walking machines. You can have a chat while you do it. Most of us are about the same age and there are plenty of ex-smokers, like me. It feels more like a group effort somehow, exercising with other people; it's moral support, I suppose. I'm feeling a lot better after going to a few of the classes, in myself and in my mood. My blood pressure had gone down last time it was checked – a great result!

I've kept on going to the gym even after the classes came to an end. The cheaper membership is a nice reward for completing the scheme, and of course I've learned how to use the equipment now. I wouldn't have had a clue before, and would never have set foot in a gym. I thought they were horrible places, for posers really. But it's fine – take your own music to listen to, that's my only advice. The stuff they play there gives me a headache.

Basically, I'm doing well. I'm fitter and healthier; my skin looks a better colour. It did look almost grey for a while. I've been able to come off my



blood pressure meds. I feel proud of myself, actually. My wife is too. The tightness and wheezing in my chest has cleared a fair bit. I'm able to go out walking or for a round of pitch and putt whenever I like. Several of the boys play regularly, and they're saying I should join in. I'm looking forward to my retirement these days. There's so much I can do now; so much we can do together.

Edwin's story highlights the challenges faced by older men in being active and identifies the role of health professionals in supporting people to be more active.

**The key messages from Edwin's story are:**

- For working age adults:
  - Be active aiming for at least 150 mins of activity every week spread across the week e.g. sports, brisk walking, exercise classes
  - Spend time actively outdoors with friends and family in parks, countryside or nature
- For health care professionals:
  - Make Every Contact Count and raise the issue of being active. For more information visit <https://mecc.publichealthnetwork.cymru/en/>
  - Consider referring those who need additional support to the National Exercise Referral Scheme



## Wynn

When you get to my age, you expect a few health problems, but I didn't think I'd be lonely. I had to give up driving and can't walk far. My balance is poor, partly because of the arthritis in my knees – I have it in my hands too, which makes doing things very hard – and partly because I'm just getting unsteady on my feet. I suppose you might describe me as frail, which sounds so old; I never thought I'd call myself frail. I sit around for most of the day, at home, avoiding climbing the stairs, or even going down the front steps to water the pots, or along the uneven garden path to look over the gate. I hate being trapped like this, but I feel so unsafe. How would I catch myself if I fell?

Months go by and I see none of my friends. I order food in, and avoid trips to the shops when I can. I cook very little– I find it hard to hold the pans; they're heavy and make my hands hurt. I mostly warm up shop-bought soup, and have cheese sandwiches, and puddings with custard to fill me up if I'm especially hungry. Not very varied, I know. I miss going to the social club every Wednesday and having a laugh with Gloria, Ros and Cathy but the buses don't run there and taxis are too expensive. I expect they'll still all be going. Why wouldn't they? I don't think any of them are disabled. I miss my brisk walks round the park, rain or shine, and a takeaway tea from the Park View Café to warm my hands on the way home. I miss being out in the world.

I fell yesterday. I was trying to get out of the bath and slipped and went flying right over the edge of the bath and hit my head on the toilet bowl. I lay there for a good few minutes and cried because I was so shocked and scared that I wouldn't be able to get up. I did manage to stand again, but I was cold by the time I'd hoisted myself upright using the edge of the bath and straightened my legs slowly, slowly, wincing. My head had a bump the size of an egg. I called my son, who drove all the way over here and took me to A&E. It was sweet of him to help me like that; he's a kind boy. I was checked over and they said I was fine to go home but to see my GP in the morning.

Doctor Price did a 'falls risk assessment' on me during the appointment today. She was very kind and understanding, as usual. When I described my living situation, she asked if I thought I was lonely or isolated. I said, yes, I was definitely both of those things. She referred me to a physiotherapist, which she said should help with my mobility. She also gave me a leaflet for a local 'Elderfit' class, where I can work on my balance. 'Will I be able to manage it?' I asked her. 'With these knees?' She smiled. 'You'll be fine. They let you take things at your own pace.' A slow pace, then, but at least I'd be doing something. I phoned my son later to tell him and he thought it was a good idea. He said he could give me a lift to the class. I was a bit worried about going but thought it was worth trying. I decided to go that same week.

The Elderfit classes are fun. Gentle, but I can feel it working. I can do a lot of the exercises sitting down if I need to. There's a nice bunch that go along, and I've enjoyed meeting them and chatting. I do look forward to it every week. We are all starting to remember the routine. The



physiotherapist has been helpful, too. A pool was used for some of the sessions and I really like the feeling of being in the water. No chance of toppling over, just bobbing about and doing the leg lifts. The physiotherapist said regular swimming would get me stronger. I've been along to the seniors swimming session on a few occasions now, and she's right – it's the perfect way to get myself moving. I can go along at my own speed and the warm water and weightlessness feels good. Overall, I'm feeling stronger and better on my feet than I have in a long time. Even the pain seems less.

I invited Gloria and the girls to join me at Elderfit and the swimming sessions. Ros and Cathy turned up to Elderfit last week and I introduced them to a couple of the women I've met at the class. We did have a giggle. All of us huffing and puffing and enjoying the music. I felt quite uplifted afterwards.

Gloria came swimming with me yesterday evening, and we had a long talk as we swam. She's been having health problems too and is taking it seriously, trying to do more physical activity. 'You can just get into a real downward spiral otherwise,' she said. 'Well, I know all about that,' I said. 'Although I really do feel I'm on the up again now.'

We walked home together, arm-in-arm, because even though my balance is quite a bit better than it was, I still feel nervous going up and down curbs. Gloria called me a chicken but helped me nonetheless and took me on my favourite route home through the park. I enjoyed the walk. And the friendship. I'm back in the world again.

Wynn's story highlights the challenges faced by older people in being active if they are concerned about falling.

**The key messages from Wynn's story are:**

- For older age adults:
  - Aim for at least 150 mins of activity every week e.g. brisk walking, exercise classes
  - Older adults at risk of falls should do something active to improve balance and co-ordination on at least two days a week.
  - Minimise the amount of time spent sitting for extended periods – get up and about
- For health care professionals:
  - Make Every Contact Count and raise the issue of being active.  
For more information visit:  
<https://mecc.publichealthnetwork.cymru/en/>
  - Signpost to Elderfit classes or specialist support  
<https://elderfit.co.uk/group-sessions/>
- For local authorities:
  - Provide and maintain local walking routes and access to green spaces for local people

