

## LET'S BE ACTIVE: THE POWER OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FOR ADULTS IN LITHUANIA

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**Introduction.** Physical inactivity is considered the fourth biggest killer in the world (1) and the main cause of non-communicable diseases, with an annual cost of € 8.4 billion (2). However, the high numbers of Europeans never exercised or played sports (3). Despite positive developments, physical inactivity among adults continues to be prevalent, requiring targeted and evidence-based interventions. There is evidence that individualized, structured and supervised training together with education can improve people's willingness to engage in regular long-term fitness training (4). However, neither in Europe nor in Lithuania, such official educational programs for novice participants have not yet been created and the effectiveness is unknown, which we tried to verify with this study.

**The aim of the study** – to reveal the impact of the educational program on the physical activity (PA), stress level, health indicators and quality of life of adults (novice exercisers).

**Methods.** The study was carried out at the 5 biggest fitness clubs in Lithuania as part of the European «Let's #BEACTIVE» project. The 6-week educational program was designed to increase the health literacy of «novice», motivate them to achieve greater PA and long-term healthy lifestyle habits and skills. The educational program and training were done under the supervision of specially trained trainers and included various topics (functional body and correct breathing, basic exercises, training methodology and safety factors, various group training, gym equipment, etc.). The intervention program lasted twice a week for 6 weeks. The survey was conducted before and after the program. Besides demographical and health-related questions, the following instruments were used: International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ-LT), Assessment of Quality of Life (AQoL-4D), Social Physique Anxiety Scale (SPAS), Perceived Stress Scale.

**Results.** 534 adults (54.7% females) agreed to participate in the study and completed the 6-week educational program. The average age of the participants was 39.92 (11.9) years and they never exercised before. Results showed that the educational exercise program had a significant effect on all PA parameters ( $p < 0.05$ ), decreased sitting time ( $p < 0.05$ ), significantly improved the quality of life, increased health evaluation and reduced perceived stress and health ailments ( $p < 0.05$ ). This program also improved the attitude towards one's body, and reduced anxiety about the evaluation of appearance in the social space ( $p < 0.05$ ). After the educational program, only 6.2% participants dropped out of the training routine and did not purchase annual fitness club membership, while studies show that 30% of participants stop exercising in the fitness clubs after 3 months, and half of the clients after 6 months (EuropeActive's Knowledge Centre).

**Conclusions.** Educational program for novices significantly improved all indicators of PA, health, perceived stress and quality of life. It was confirmed that promotion of PA among adults should go hand in hand with improving health and physical literacy, as an informed and aware person is better prepared for long-term lifestyle changes. Fitness training and PA for novice adults must be supervised only by specially educated and skilled trainers. Education, along with PA, should be a priority in promoting the nation's health and active lifestyle.

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### References

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