Soon after the government released guidance on social distancing and other coronavirus (Covid-19) measures, Sport England commissioned Savant ComRes¹ to conduct regular surveys to assess physical activity attitudes and activity levels of people with long-term health conditions (LTHCs) in England. They also surveyed people without LTHCs so that comparisons could be made. DJS Research² and RDSi Research³ also completed regular tracking data of how Covid-19 was affecting people with LTHCs. Here, Neil Gibson, Senior Physical Activity Advisor at Diabetes UK, highlights some of the key findings of the survey and suggests some of the resources that healthcare professionals can use.
The NHS and healthcare professionals are overwhelmingly the most sought out places for guidance on how to be active.

- Most people with LTHCs are worried about leaving their homes, even with the loosening of restrictions. There is fear among people with LTHCs about the easing of lockdown, alongside feelings of confusion, worry, and concern. The recent insight shows that although people with LTHCs, on average, are now less likely to worry about leaving their homes compared with during lockdown, the majority are still worried about doing so (55%). This level of worry about leaving their homes also remains significantly higher when compared to those people who do not have a LTHC (41%).
- People with LTHCs want tangible, accessible solutions to support them. In addressing the current challenges, there needs to be a greater emphasis on safety, routine building, mental health and community care.

It was also found that the NHS and healthcare professionals are overwhelmingly the most sought out places for guidance on how to be active. This was followed by friends/family/carers. These are the places that people with a LTHC are most likely to rank highly when deciding where to get trusted information and guidance on how to be active. This has also been demonstrated in previous studies (pre-Covid-19) and research that Diabetes UK completed last year.

What can you do?

Subsequently, Diabetes UK helped peer review three new online Cambridge Diabetes Education Programme training modules for healthcare staff (www.cdep.org.uk). These are:

- Physical Activity in Children and Young People with Type 1 Diabetes
- Physical Activity in Adults with Type 1 Diabetes
- Physical Activity in People with Pre-diabetes, Gestational or Type 2 Diabetes.

Additionally, there are adult and paediatric diabetes resources to help healthcare professionals integrate physical activity conversations into routine clinical care at Moving Medicine. You can access this at: movingmedicine.ac.uk Diabetes UK also has resources and tools for general diabetes care for healthcare professionals and will be adding new physical activity content for people with diabetes throughout 2021. There is already physical activity content on Diabetes UK’s clinically approved interactive Learning Zone tool, which can be a useful place to signpost patients to. This can be accessed at: learningzone.diabetes.org.uk

The Sport England-funded ‘We Are Undefeatable’ campaign is going to continue, with Diabetes UK as a partner. Their website (www.weareundefeatable.co.uk) provides resources that patients can use. You may see and hear some of the new TV and radio adverts over the next few months. Here’s hoping that it might encourage more people with diabetes to increase their physical activity levels in the future.

References

1. Sport England (2020), Savanta ComRes survey. Physical activity attitudes and behaviours. Surveys carried out weekly over eight weeks between 3 April and 25 May 2020, then ad hoc surveys at key points, such as the weekend most indoor sport and physical activity facilities were allowed to reopen. Each wave included circa, 2,000 nationally representative responses. This survey can be found at Sport England.org/Savanta ComRes
2. RSS Research (2020) We Are Undefeatable Tracking Research (20 March to 7 April 2020)
3. RDSI (2020) Audience Insights – online research community (23 participants with a mix of different long-term health conditions). Research community live since beginning of April 2020

Summary of key Covid-19 insights2,3

What we’ve learnt since the onset of the pandemic and the beginning of lockdown:

- During the height of the pandemic and lockdown restrictions, around four in 10 people with LTHCs were reporting doing less physical activity than normal.
- Around a quarter of people with LTHCs have not been doing 30 mins of physical activity on any day over the course of a week.
- Attitudes around capability, opportunity and motivation to do physical activity have remained significantly lower for people with LTHCs compared with people without a health condition.
- People with LTHCs have been less likely to find new ways to be active, and less likely to think they’ve had more time to be active compared with people without a health condition.
- Worry about Covid-19 is now one of the most frequently cited barriers to physical activity for people with LTHCs, alongside the top condition-related issues. Levels of stress, anxiety, and fear are heightened amongst people with LTHCs.
- People with LTHCs are also more likely to have been feeling guilty, both about wanting, and not wanting, to exercise over the course of the pandemic. Feeling guilty about not exercising more has increased significantly in people with LTHCs since the beginning of April.