



Supporting physical activity and functional capacity among older caregivers (CAREFIT)

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As the population ages, the demand for daily assistance increases. Informal caregiving plays a significant role in addressing the growing need for care. While this form of care is cost-effective for society and allows for personalized care that meets the needs of the individual being cared for, it also poses challenges to the health of aging caregivers. Research shows that caregiving responsibilities can lead to decline in caregivers' health, especially as the demands of care increase.

The CAREFIT project examines the functional ability and physical activity of older caregivers, focusing on how caregiving impacts their adherence to a lifestyle program. The goal is to determine how and what type of physical activity can enhance caregivers' functional ability and well-being in the long term. This project is a collaboration between the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare and

Tampere University, with close cooperation with the Caregivers Finland Association.

The CAREFIT project is based on the FINGER study, which showed that a multifactorial lifestyle program can prevent the decline in cognitive and physical functioning in older individuals at risk of dementia. In the first phase of the CAREFIT project, the long-term development of caregivers' physical activity and functional ability will be examined, along with the barriers to and incentives for physical activity, using extensive data collected over more than 10 years from the FINGER study.

Caregiving responsibilities often make it difficult for caregivers to participate and adhere to lifestyle programs. The CAREFIT project aims to understand caregivers' specific needs, limitations, and preferences regarding physical activity by interviewing caregivers and professionals working with them. This information will guide the development and implementation of a six-month, tailored physical activity-focused lifestyle program (pilot intervention). The primary goal of the pilot is to assess the feasibility of the intervention and caregivers' adherence to it. Additionally, the aim is to investigate the effects of the intervention on caregivers' physical activity and functional ability.

The CAREFIT project will provide scientific

knowledge on the challenges, incentives, and benefits of physical activity for the well-being of older caregivers. This will support the development of targeted exercise programs that enhance caregivers' well-being, thereby improving their ability to care for their loved ones. On a societal level, the project aims to achieve significant improvements in caregivers' well-being, which in turn can reduce healthcare costs and improve the quality of care. Recommendations and a framework will be developed to integrate physical activity interventions into caregivers' daily lives. This will benefit decision-makers and healthcare professionals to support the well-being of family carers.

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