

Managing post-operative pain with table tennis - Frances' story

Theme: disability, physical activity, physical wellbeing, social development

Defining the Issue

At the age of 17, Frances was diagnosed with spina bifida, leading to the need for surgery. Where the operation resulted in debilitating back pain and physical inactivity, after a gap of more than 25 years, Frances returned to playing regular table tennis to help manage post-operative pain.

Background

Frances established a love for sport at a young age. Alongside playing and competing at a high-level in netball and athletics, table tennis was just one of the sports she enjoyed as a child. Soon after being introduced to table tennis at school, Frances attended weekly practice sessions at her local sports centre.

At the age of 17, after experiencing a trampolining accident, tests discovered that Frances had been living with spina bifida since birth. Spina bifida is a condition caused by the neural tube not developing or closing properly, leading to defects in the spinal cord and bones of the spine.

Frances underwent spinal surgery, which later down the line resulted in ongoing episodes of debilitating back pain and physical inactivity. This was made worse going into adulthood by increasing work demands.

More recently, Frances was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes, thought to be partly linked to physical inactivity caused by post-operative pain and work life.

After receiving physiotherapy treatment, and putting large focus on core strengthening, Frances returned to table tennis at the age of 52 - after a gap of more than 25 years.



Impact

Frances was reintroduced to table tennis after finding out through a local magazine about sessions for Over 50's at the Olney Centre in Olney.

Getting back into table tennis was initially challenging for Frances, due to post-operative pain. Over time, once reconditioned to the movements used in table tennis, and as a result of muscles strengthening in her back, the challenges for Frances became less.

"Initially my back was very painful and stiff. I managed this with hot and cold compresses, anti-inflammatories and pain killers. The need to do this lessened over the first few months as my muscles developed and I got used to the movement."

Exercising through table tennis has also played an important role in managing Frances' diabetes by lowering blood glucose levels and improving insulin sensitivity.



Together with the benefits to her physical wellbeing, Frances recognises the positive impact of table tennis on social development.

"It has opened the door to new friendships, a chance to have fun whilst exercising."

As well as taking part in the social table tennis sessions for Over 50's at the Olney Centre at least once a week, Frances now also plays in the Milton Keynes league.

"Table tennis has been a game changer for me in respect of my overall health, my back and helping to manage my diabetes."

Key Learnings

1. Table tennis can be used during post-operative care for pain management
2. Exercising through table tennis can help reduce diabetic complications
3. Table tennis can support social development

Further Information

To find out more about how we're supporting inclusive table tennis opportunities, and to find your nearest table, please visit our website at

<https://www.tabletennisengland.co.uk/>



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