

Why won't children keep exercising? Barriers and facilitators to exercise and physical activity maintenance– a qualitative study

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Objectives: Exercise is low-cost, low-risk, high-benefit and recommended for all children and young people (CYP) with CF, however levels of participation vary. Exercise interventions can be effective at increasing levels of physical activity and exercise, but less is known about maintaining participation.

CYP with CF, and one parent each, were interviewed 12-35 months after participating in an exercise RCT (INSPIRE-CF), in order to:

1. Identify experiences and attitudes towards exercise among CYP with CF, and their parents;
2. Explore barriers and facilitators to exercise and physical activity maintenance.

Methods: 40 one-to-one interviews were held with 20 CYP (aged 11-16 years; 6 male) and parents (17 mothers, 3 fathers). Data were analysed using thematic analysis. Themes were independently identified by two coders and confirmed via discussion.

Results: All participants recognised CF-specific health benefits of exercise.

Exercise facilitators: 'fun', 'other people' 'skill/experience' and 'normal part of life' were identified by CYP and parents. In addition parents thought that competition could be motivational for some CYP but a deterrent for others.

Exercise barriers: CYP: 'impact of CF', 'lack of skill', 'impact/perceptions of others' and 'pain/other sensations'; parents: mentioned 'lack of confidence', 'intimidated by others' and 'attitude/mood of CYP'.

Accountability to another, most notably a trainer, was thought to influence exercise maintenance.

Conclusions: Qualitative analysis indicated that exercise was perceived as beneficial by CYP with CF, and the sociability, fun and 'normality' of exercise were considered important. This is the first study to suggest that adult facilitation is required to maintain exercise in CYP, and that having a personal trainer or supporter helped. Future interventions must overcome modifiable barriers, e.g. building skill and confidence, and providing support.