**WHAT IS IT?**

**Fit & Strong!** is a CDC approved group-based exercise and self-management program designed to help people manage the symptoms of *lower extremity osteoarthritis (OA)*. The program is led by trained instructors and the 90 minute sessions occur 2-3 times per week for about 8 weeks (24 total sessions). Each class session consists of 60 minutes of physical activity made up of flexibility, low-impact aerobics, balance, and lower extremity strength exercises followed by 30 minutes of instructor-facilitated health education for self-management. During the 24 session program, each participant meets with the instructor one-on-one to develop a negotiated adherence contract – a concrete plan for how to stay active and manage their OA after the class ends.

**WHO IS IT FOR?**

The program is designed for persons (especially older adults) with *symptomatic OA in their lower bodies*, e.g. knee, hip, ankle, or lower back pain and stiffness. The class accommodates all ability levels by tailoring ankle weights and aerobic pace to each person’s capacity at entry and gradually increasing resistance and aerobic pace over the course of the class.

**WHAT DOES IT DO?**

The program provides a *fun, social, and welcoming environment* for older adults to exercise safely and learn from their peers and trained instructors. The initial RCT of the program included 215 *community dwelling older adults* (average age 74) in Chicago with confirmed osteoarthritis. Results at 12 months of follow-up showed *improvements in adherence to exercise and self-efficacy for exercise and arthritis management* as well as *reductions in joint pain and stiffness*. A large, follow-up *multi-site effectiveness trial* of 544 older adults (age 66) supported these benefits and also *showed improvements in upper and lower body strength, mobility, anxiety, and depression out to 18 months*. 

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**How To Discuss**

This is an intervention for those with symptomatic osteoarthritis (OA) in their lower extremities, e.g. joint pain and stiffness. OA is the most common cause of disability in older adults because the usual response to pain is to move the affected joints less. Patients should be reminded that their joints operate on a “move it or lose it” basis. Sedentary behavior will exacerbate their OA symptoms. But safe exercise and self-management can alleviate their OA symptoms and help them regain their confidence, mobility, and independence.