

Introduction

Physical activity is known to be a beneficial tool for people with MS that is safe, optimises quality of life, manages symptoms, restores function and promotes participation and independence.

Studies have settled exercise as effective symptomatic treatment (tertiary prevention) and more recent research has looked at the disease modifying effects (secondary prevention), proposing “exercise is medicine in MS”².

Using an evidence-based approach Neuro Heroes has created online group exercise sessions to include exercises that address common difficulties in MS, with a format that aims to reduce known barriers to exercise such as accessibility³. Live, physio-led sessions allow us to respond to individuals’ needs and adapt exercises in real time to different levels, helping people of all abilities work towards meeting exercise guidelines for MS⁴. We asked current clients, people interested in Neuro Heroes who do not attend and the wider MS community about their attitudes to doing, or not doing exercise to help manage their condition.

Methods

Neuro Heroes offered a focus group and questionnaire to all those in the community to gather perspectives. Participants volunteered information online over Zoom, written in a questionnaire and via social media.

The aim of this information gathering was to get a better understanding of why people with MS attend Neuro Heroes sessions, why they do not attend regularly, what they want from exercise sessions and what support they would like to access activity options as health and physical abilities change.

Outcomes

The focus group was attended by eight people and the online questionnaire completed by six people. There was a range of demographics, ability levels, symptoms and current activity participation. Of these 14 people eight regularly attend Neuro Heroes classes. Guided discussion resulted in several themes emerging which are considered in this poster.

Awareness

People with MS hear about Neuro Heroes in a range of ways, but mainly through word of mouth from local MS Society groups, The National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, or through a friend or family member. In the wider Neuro Heroes MS community around 50% are referred by a health professional.

Only 20% of those asked were aware of the MS Exercise Guidelines and the amount and types of exercise that are recommended in the literature.



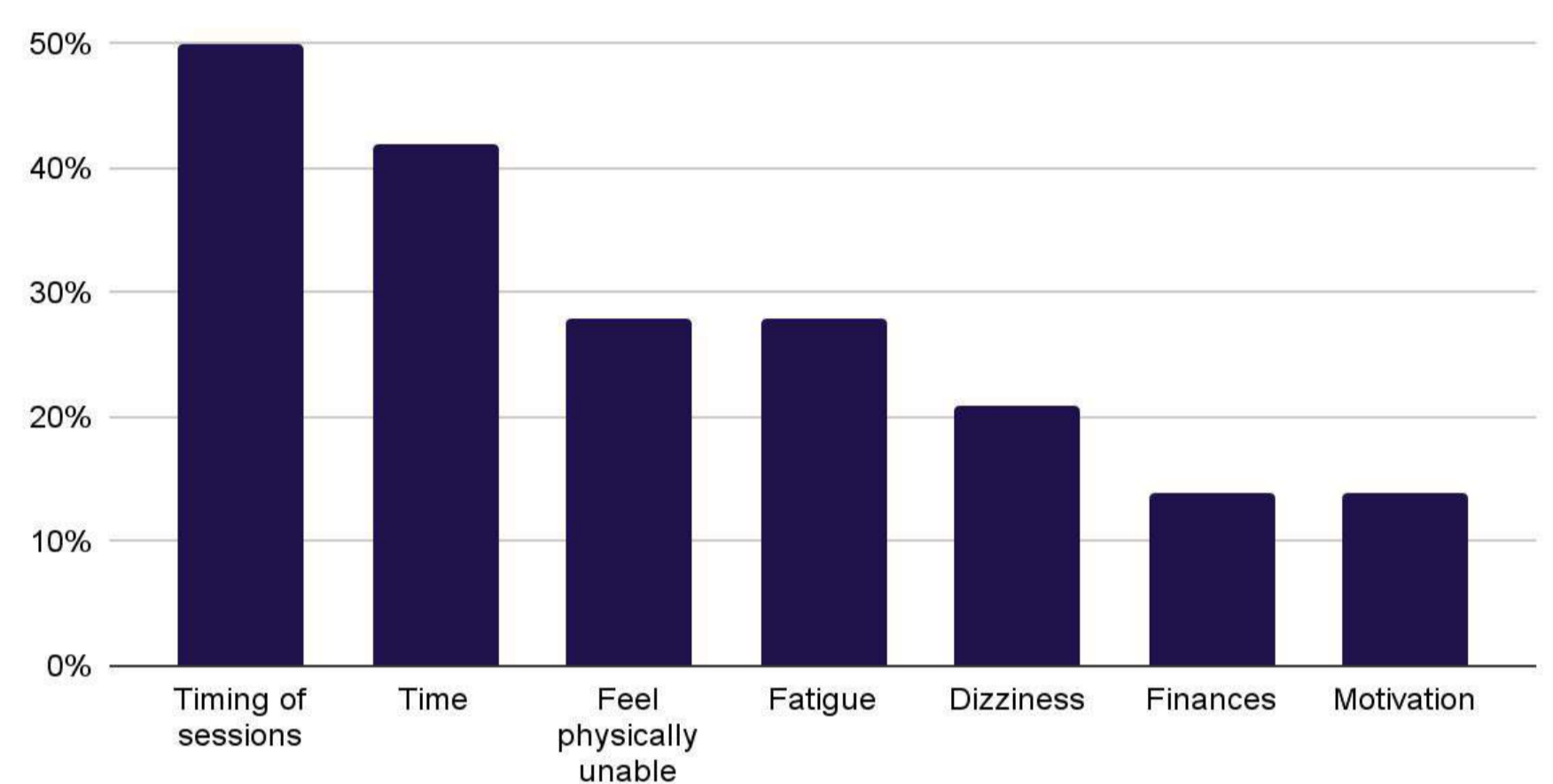
What to expect from exercise

People were unsure what to expect from a Neuro Heroes class and exercise in general before trying it. People expressed this could provoke anxiety that may outweigh the motivation to exercise.

Barriers to participation

The timing of exercise sessions available is important to people. Many want to exercise in the evening and on weekends around work hours, however others report evening sessions would be difficult due to fatigue.

Barriers to attending Neuro Heroes Online Exercise Sessions



What people want

There are aspects of MS specific online classes that people appreciate, as outlined below. People also seek emphasis on the evidence behind programmes, and reassurance that they can move at their own pace, doing exercises that are adapted to people’s needs on the day. Outside of classes people requested practical advice, exercise videos, and education on the science behind the benefits of exercise for people with MS.



Conclusions

The Neuro Heroes MS community perceive exercise as important but may have had little access to education, which we as healthcare professionals are encouraged to provide⁵. These findings suggest it’s important to:

- Explain MS exercise guidelines and the benefits activity can bring, even to dizziness, fatigue and symptoms that stop people participating
- Offer evidence based exercise programmes and people/information for ongoing exercise support, building long term engagement and confidence. Encourage people to ‘give it a go’ to see how they fare.
- Point out exercise may look different to before but “it can help to build confidence in understanding your body” as one person reported.
- Emphasise that people can move at their own pace and still reap rewards. Exercises can be adapted along the way.

References

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