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Insurance should pay for exercise programs to cut health costs, UF expert says



By Linda Shrieves, Orlando Sentinel
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Health insurance companies should pay for exercise classes, which would in turn reduce health-care costs, especially among high-risk groups, such as **diabetics**, says a **University of Florida** researcher.

In an editorial in the Journal of the **American Medical Association**, Dr. Marco Pahor, director of the University of Florida Institute on Aging, says health insurers— particularly federal programs such as **Medicare** — ought to pay for structured exercise classes because the health benefits and cost-savings outweigh the expense.

"Cumulative work over the past few decades provides solid evidence for public policymakers to consider structured physical activity and exercise programs as worthy of insurance reimbursement," Pahor said.

Although exercise is beneficial for everyone, "the greatest benefits of physical exercise are achieved in those who are highest risk, such as those with diabetes," Pahor said. Studies show, he added, that among patients with type 2 diabetes, structured physical exercise is effective in controlling blood sugar, and those types of exercise programs are cost-effective.

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Pahor's paper, which was published Tuesday, May 3, accompanies an analysis of many clinical trials that examined the effect of exercise and physical activity on the control of blood glucose levels.


A number of studies have linked exercise programs with better health indicators, including **blood pressure**, lipid levels — such as cholesterol and triglycerides — cardiovascular events, cognition, physical performance, premature death and quality of life.


In JAMA, Pahor's editorial accompanied a study conducted by Dr. Daniel Umpierre of the Hospital de Clinicas de Porto Alegre, Brazil. Umpierre and his colleagues compared the link between advice on physical activity, structured exercise programs and markers of


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