

# Green Prescriptions work!

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We know you've heard about the Green Prescription (GRx) health initiative but do you really know how great it is and how to use it?

It's quick and easy to "prescribe green". After establishing that the patient's health would benefit from increasing their activity levels and that any conditions have stabilised, it is just a matter of issuing the GRx using the script pad or PMS template.

Green Prescriptions can be used with any patients who have a stable medical condition or are at risk from the following medical conditions: overweight and obesity, hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes, arthritis, and depression/anxiety.

### May 2004 Patient Survey results

One of the strengths of GRx is that patients can receive free support in their lifestyle change for three to four months from their Regional Sports Trust. The referring GP or practice nurse receives feed-back on progress with achieving goals from the patient's GRx patient support personnel.

An assessment of the long-term effectiveness of the GRx programme undertaken by researchers at the University of Auckland and Waikato general practices<sup>1</sup> indicates that:

- A GRx increases physical activity levels and improves quality of life over 12 months without any evidence of adverse effects
- This physical activity intervention may reduce blood pressure by an average of 1-2 mm Hg over 12 months
- For every 10 GRx written, one person achieved and sustained 150 minutes of moderate or vigorous leisure activity per week after 12 months. Achieving this amount of activity (using up an additional 1,000 kcal/week) is associated with a 20-30% risk reduction in all causes of mortality compared with sedentary individuals.
- Prompting practice staff to deliver the intervention will increase its effectiveness

### Cost-Effectiveness

The cost-effectiveness of the GRx physical activity counselling programme was assessed by Elley and co-workers (2005). Significant increases in physical activity were found in a ran-

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domised controlled trial with 12-month follow-up involving 878 'less-active' patients aged 40-79 years in 42 general practices in the Waikato. The incremental cost of converting a 'sedentary' adult to an 'active' state over a twelve-month period was NZ\$1,756 in programme costs. The GRx is therefore a relatively inexpensive way of increasing activity for sedentary people, with the potential to have significant economic impact through reduction in cardiovascular and other morbidity and mortality.

### Green Prescriptions from a patient's perspective

Eighty-two percent of patients are satisfied with the overall support from their Regional Sports Trust.

*What are patients saying about Green Prescriptions?*

- I think these people are doing a wonderful service for us older people to help us stay on our feet.
- All I can say is thank you because I now have been able to attend hui on Marae.
- I think the GRx is a great motivator and the support people I dealt with were all first class.
- I've told my other whanau to check it out.

- It is the longest I have stuck with an exercise programme.
- GRx encouraged me to enter Round the Bays - gave me a goal to go for.
- I lacked the motivation and had suffered severe depression. They kept up the contact and encouragement I needed to make a start at being more active.
- If it wasn't for their support I would still be a couch potato. Now my weekends are a lot more enjoyable than before I started.

### REFERENCES

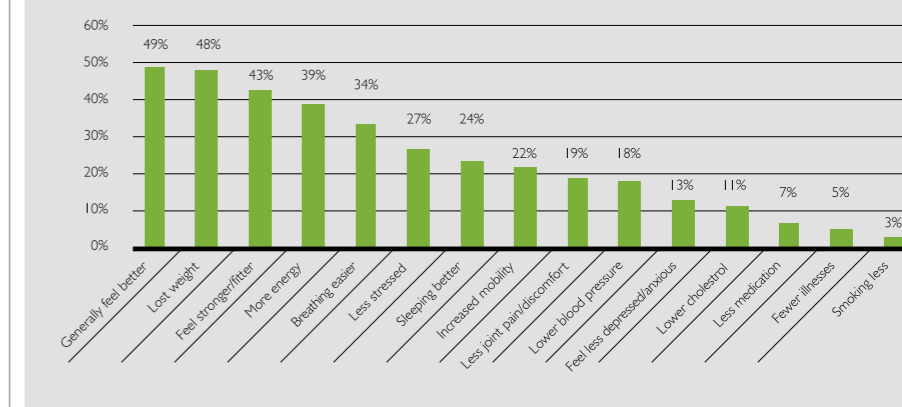
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To find out more about Green Prescriptions: visit [www.pushplay.org.nz](http://www.pushplay.org.nz) or freephone **0800 ACTIVE** (0800 228483)

### CONCLUSION

Health promotion is an important component of Primary Health Organisations activities. Green Prescriptions are consistent with the health promotion approach and can easily be integrated into a PHO setting. The GRx initiative is sustainable in usual general practice.

### Health changes noticed by GRx patients



Source: SPARC, May 2004 Patient Survey results

## Judith Kamaru: A Success Story

**At the beginning of this year, Judith felt she had hit rock bottom.** She was battling depression and using painkillers and anti-inflammatories nearly everyday to try to numb the pain caused by past fractures in her lower back.

In February 2004 Judith gathered the courage to ask her doctor for help and was offered a Green Prescription. Soon after, she received a call from Vanessa Hughey at

Sport Southland, as part of the Green Prescription Support Service. Vanessa connected her to different types of activities, and gave her some ideas on activities she could be involved in.



Judith says she "is now a new person". She has stopped taking the painkillers she desperately needed before and is feeling on top of the world. Judith's back pain has also significantly reduced, along with her inhibitions. She now aqua-jogs two to three times a week and is involved in the Cyclofit cycling programme with Cycling Southland. "The cycling is fantastic! I can train inside or out, it's very social and it's free!". The Cyclofit initiative is a programme designed to provide supervised and

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supported recreational cycling opportunities for adults. The participants are encouraged to set personal goals and it aims to provide low impact aerobic activity for those who cannot manage weight-bearing activity.

Judith's motivation to continue in physical activity is the desire to be pain-free. There is also a family history of diabetes and she "doesn't want to go there". By gradually building up her physical activity levels, Judith hopes to become healthier and more involved in a variety of activities. One of her achievements was being involved in the annual Cancer Society 'Relay for Life' this March. "I never would have done something like this before, but now the sky's the limit!" Judith's next goal is to join social netball next season. You go girl!

