



# People with long-term conditions and attitudes towards physical activity

Research conducted on behalf of the  
Richmond Group

March 2016

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# Key insights

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Even the most incapacitated people we spoke to say that they want to be more physically active - indicating a valuable messaging opportunity for the Richmond Group

2

Both exercise and physical activity are seen as “not for people like me” amongst inactive participants with multiple long-term conditions

However, whilst the broad understanding of both are similar, the negative connotations (e.g. pain) of “exercise” are more top-of-mind, whilst “physical activity” has associations with tasks such as housework and gardening

3

The strongest barriers to physical activity are internal and relate to the symptoms experienced by those with LTCs (e.g. pain, breathlessness)

However, the most commonly identified benefits (e.g. preventing conditions from deteriorating) do not address these barriers. Consequently, messages claiming to improve symptoms are dismissed

# Key insights

4

Successful messages have 3 key attributes:

- They speak to everybody, regardless of their demographic or current levels of activity
- They combine positivity about the benefits of physical activity with realism about what is achievable, giving them credibility
- They speak to people's aspirations for their own lives, for example spending time with their grandchildren, or being independent

5

Weaker messages also have 3 key attributes:

- They challenge the lived experiences of those with LTCs (e.g. by saying that exercise can manage pain)
- They are interpreted as patronising (e.g. by making assumptions about individuals' conditions or assuming that their life is in some way circumscribed)
- Their tone is bossy, with language that instructs rather than encourages



# Methodology

# Background and context

- The Richmond Group's Sport and Physical Activity project identified a need for insight into physical activity and long-term conditions
- The Richmond Group therefore commissioned BritainThinks to conduct research with those with LTCs, and people close to individuals with LTCs to understand:
  - Knowledge, attitudes and behaviours in relation to physical activity
  - The barriers that prevent those with LTCs from engaging in physical activity
  - The impact of messages aimed at encouraging an increase in physical activity

# Overview of methodology



Literature review

8 x depth interviews

- 6 with people with multiple LTCs who never / rarely exercise
- 2 with people who are close to someone with multiple LTCs

Message development workshop

- Incorporating emerging findings from the depths

5 x focus groups

- 4 x groups with people with LTCs who never / rarely exercise
  - 1 x group with people close to someone with an LTC

Interim findings

Online poll

- Poll with 323 respondents
- Average survey length: 14 minutes

Analysis and reporting

# Methodology: depth interviews and groups

## Depth interviews:

- 8 interviews
  - 6 with people with multiple LTCs who rarely or never exercise
  - 2 with people who provide help and assistance to someone with multiple LTCs who rarely or never exercises (referred to here as “carers”)
  - 4 interviews with participants in Southampton; 4 interview with participants in Lancashire
  - Interviews were carried out between 4<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> January 2016
- Interviews conducted over the phone, and lasted 30 - 40 minutes

## Focus groups:

- 5 focus groups, each with 6 participants
  - 4 groups with participants with multiple LTCs who rarely or never exercise
    - 2 groups with participants who have had some form of contact with Richmond Group charities
    - 2 with participants who have not had any contact with Richmond Group charities
  - 1 group with people who are close to someone with multiple LTCs who rarely or never exercises (referred to as “carers”)
- Focus groups lasted 90 minutes and were conducted in London and Harlow
  - 27<sup>th</sup> January 2016 - Harlow
  - 28<sup>th</sup> January 2016 - London
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2016 - London

## Definition of “physical activity”:

*Any activity that gets you up and moving. This might include things like walking to the shops, gardening or doing the housework, as well as things like riding a bike, going for a swim, or playing football.*



# Methodology: online poll

## Online poll:

- Survey of 323 respondents drawn from an online panel
  - 109 respondents with 1 LTC
  - 107 respondents with 2+ LTCs
  - 100 respondents without any LTCs, but who are close to someone with an LTC
- Fieldwork was conducted between 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> February 2016
- Average survey length: 14 minutes
- Due to the lack of available data on the target audiences, quotas were not set and the data have not been weighted. Data should therefore be seen as indicative
  - Details of the sample structure are available in Appendix 1



# Levels of physical activity

# Online and qualitative samples

- The primary audience for this project was extremely inactive people with multiple LTCs, i.e. those who engage in physical activity once a week or less
  - This determined the sample structure for the depth interviews and focus groups
- However, those with LTCs who are more active were a secondary audience
  - A decision was therefore made to include these individuals in the quantitative phase

# Many of our qualitative participants are extremely inactive

- Many of the people we spoke to in the depth interviews do very limited amounts of physical activity on a day-to-day basis
  - For some, doing the washing up, or going to the front door is the limit of their activity
  - Those who are still in work are more likely to leave the house, but are reliant on cars to get around
- Participants in the groups tend to be slightly more active but still do limited amounts of physical activity
  - For many walking to shops is the limit of their activity
- For both audiences, a health crisis was the most common trigger for stopping physical activity, although some had never been physically active

*“I would say if I can do half an hour of vacuuming or putting the bins out then that would be a maximum for me per day.”*

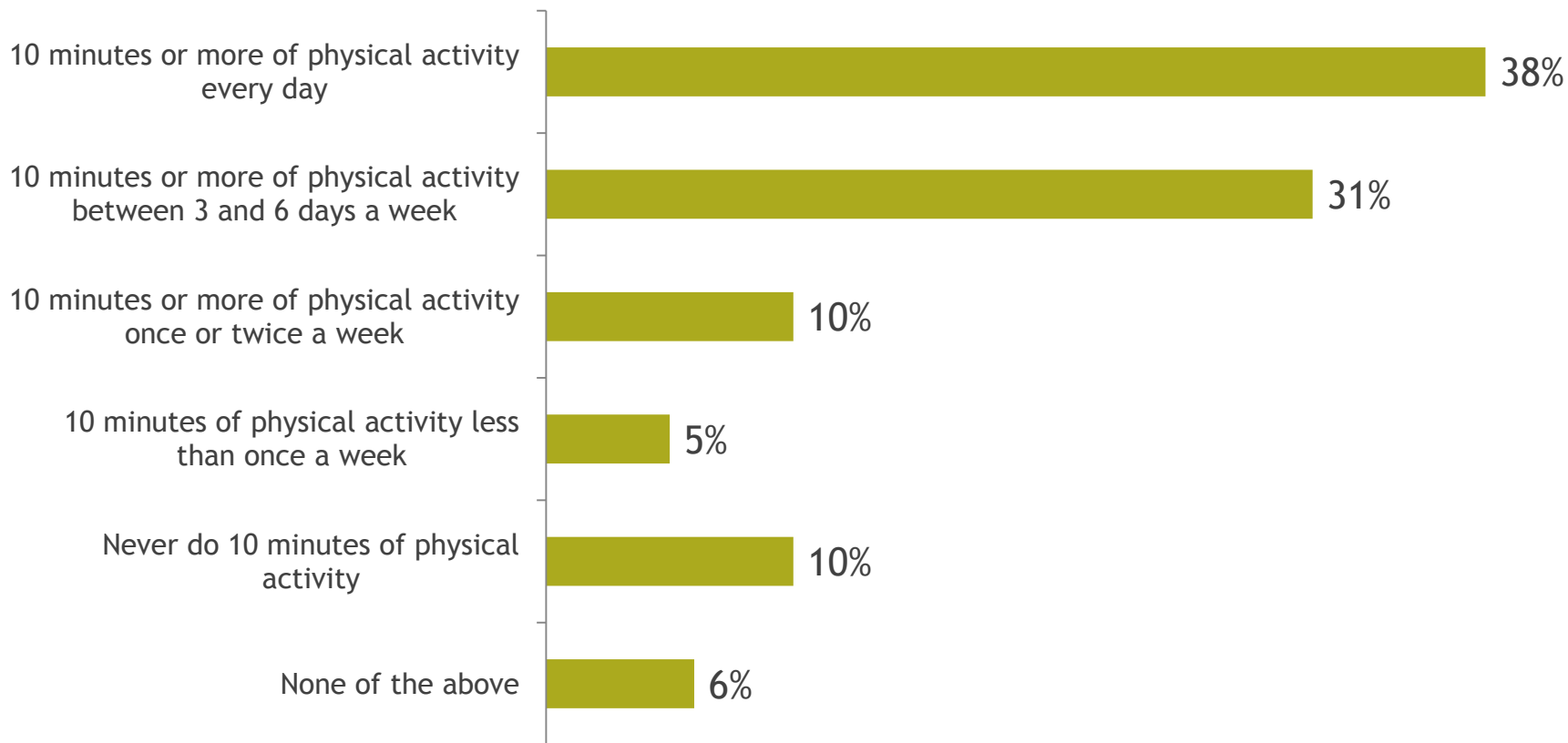
Multiple LTCs, Male,  
Depth interview

*“I’ve not been out of the house for 4 months. I can’t walk very far... Mainly, any exercise to me is pottering about, emptying the waste bins, tidying up in general. That’s all I can do.”*

Multiple LTCs, Female,  
Depth Interview

# In contrast, 38% of survey respondents with LTCs say they do at least 10 minutes of physical activity every day

Levels of physical activity amongst survey respondents with LTCs

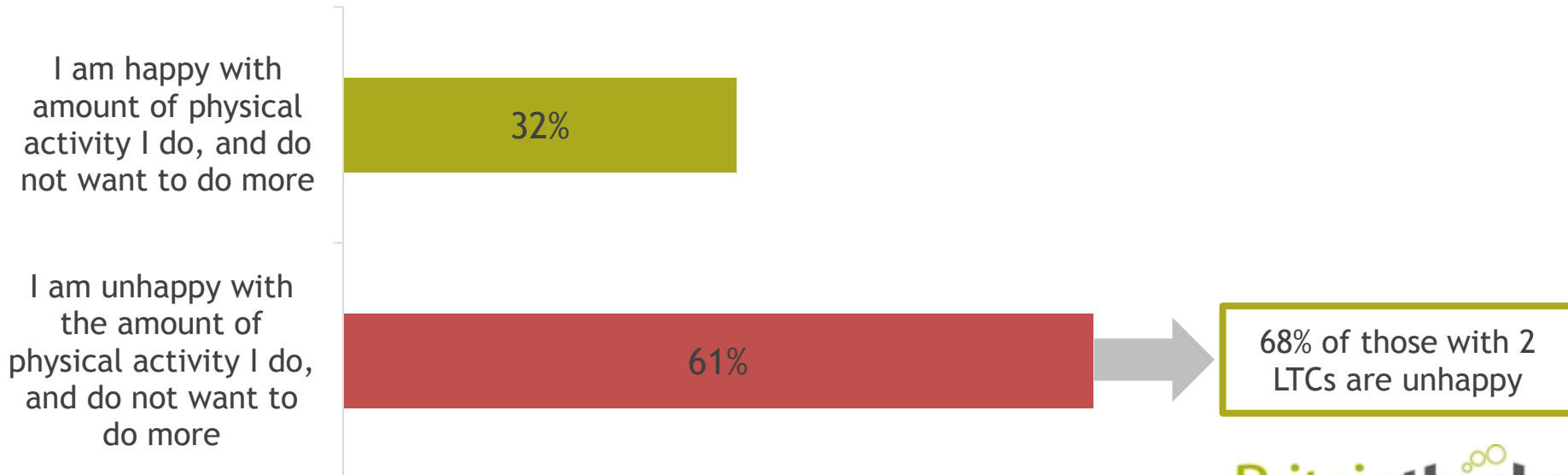


# Across both strands, a stated desire amongst those with LTCs to be more active indicates a messaging opportunity

- Despite their conditions, many participants with LTCs in the qualitative research wanted to be more active
  - But struggled to see how to achieve this
- For those who used to be active, there was a real nostalgia for their previous lifestyle

*“When I see cyclists, I think I used to be part of that and I’m not anymore... I really feel I ought to do more exercise.”*  
Multiple LTCs, Male, Depth interview

## Happiness with levels of physical activity amongst those with LTCs



Q. Which of the following best describes how you feel about your levels of physical activity? Base: All with a long-term condition (n=216)



# Understanding of physical activity versus exercise

Both “exercise” and “physical activity” have negative connotations, but these are more pronounced for “exercise”

What are the first 3 words or phrases that come into your head when you think of...

Exercise



Physical activity





# And most of our qualitative participants do not associate themselves with either term

- Exercise is seen by some as being more rigorous than physical activity
  - Participants are more likely to associate exercise with “high impact” activities
  - Some also associate it with team or group activities
- Whilst physical activity tends to be associated with slightly older people
  - 40+, as opposed to 20s and 30s
- And with tasks like gardening, or housework
- However, for the majority of participants neither term relates to them

*“I imagined the same person, the one thing I did put that was different is in physical activity they’re doing it on their own, but with exercise I thought of a friend.”*

Multiple LTCs, Male, Focus Group

*“[Exercise is] strenuous, it is like a regime you get. Physical activity, is just like leaving for a short walk.”*

Multiple LTCs, Male, Focus Group



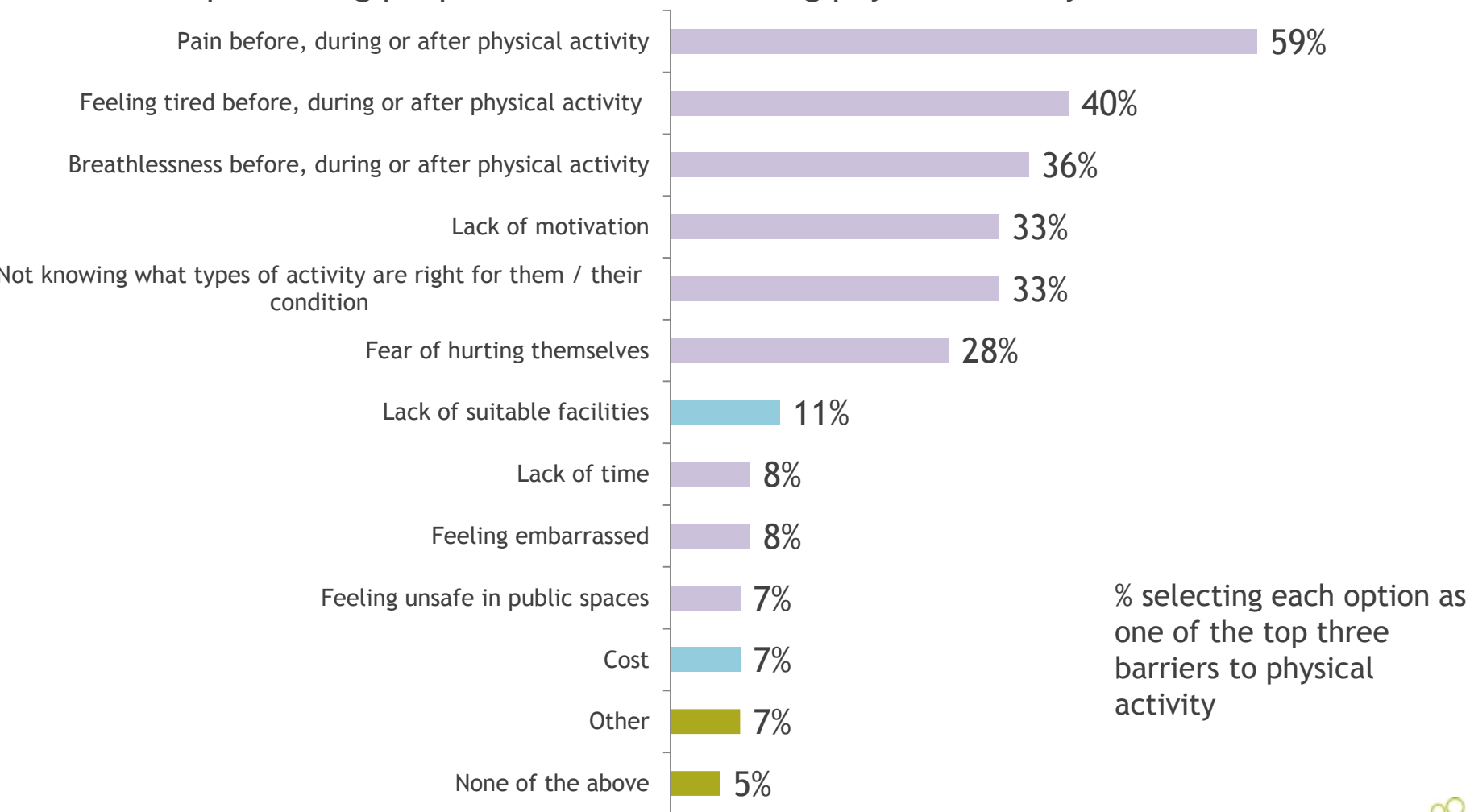
# Barriers to and benefits of physical activity

# People with LTCs experience both internal and external barriers to exercise

- There are two types of barriers to exercise:
  - **Internal barriers:**
    - These are barriers that come from within those with LTCs themselves
  - **External barriers:**
    - Factors external to those with LTCs that make it harder for them to exercise
      - These are often practical or logistical

# Internal barriers are perceived to be greater than external barriers

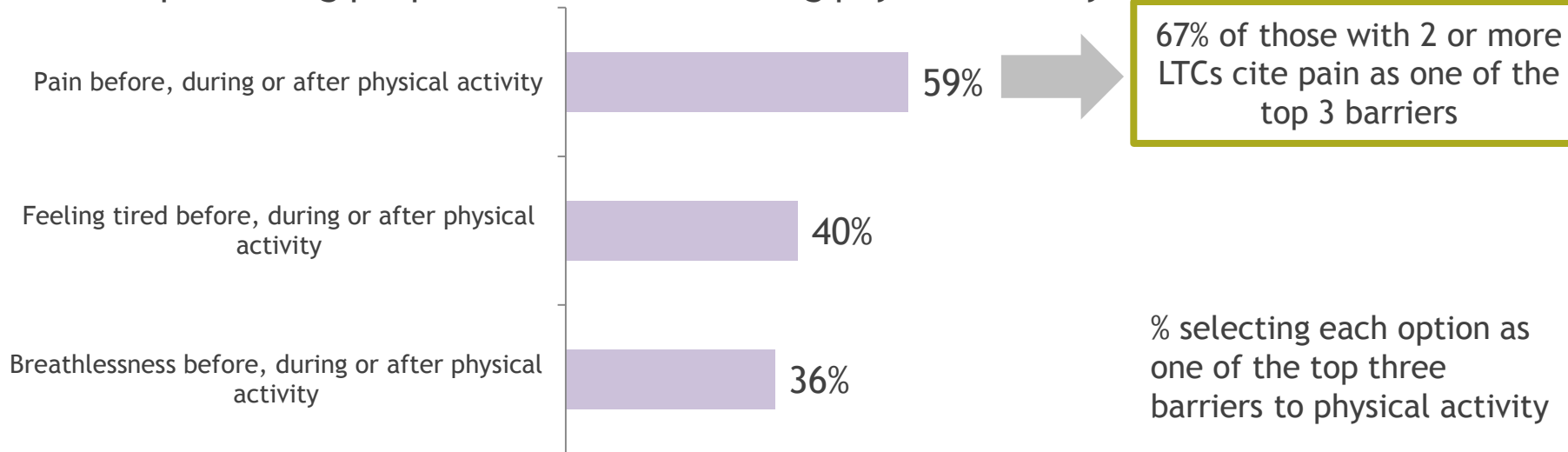
## Barriers preventing people with LTCs from doing physical activity



Q. The following are some barriers that might stop people with long-term conditions from doing physical activity. Please select the biggest barrier you think would be most likely to stop people with long-term conditions from doing physical activity. Base: All (n=323)

# Within this, there is agreement that barriers arising from the symptoms of LTCs are greatest

## Barriers preventing people with LTCs from doing physical activity



- In the qualitative research, those with LTCs were clear that day-to-day pain, breathlessness or exhaustion is exacerbated by physical activity
- This contributes to a feeling that being more active is impossible / not suitable for “people like me”

*“Pain. I can’t stand up for long. I get shaky, I don’t know if that’s the back or the Parkinson’s.”*  
Multiple LTCs, Female, Depth interview

*“When you are restricted by pain and physical activity causes pain, it is very difficult.”*  
Multiple LTCs, Female, Focus group

## Qualitative participants agree physical activity is “good for your health” - but those with LTCs struggle to explain what this means for them

- Almost all qualitative participants find it much easier to cite barriers to physical activity than benefits
- Participants know physical activity is “good for your health”
  - But many of those with LTCs find it hard to identify specific benefits that relate to their conditions
  - Or feel their health is so poor that this no longer applies to them
- Beyond this, the benefits cited most commonly by qualitative participants are psychological
  - Increased self-esteem and confidence
  - Improved mood and motivation
- Social benefits are also important for many
  - Getting out of the house and seeing people
    - This was seen to support the psychological benefits
  - Carers are particularly likely to stress this benefit
    - As are those who are largely house-bound

*“You feel better. Your head feels clearer.”*

Multiple LTCs, Male, Focus Group

*“The confidence, if you are able [to exercise] then you are more confident to do things. If you feel more confident then you feel happier.”*

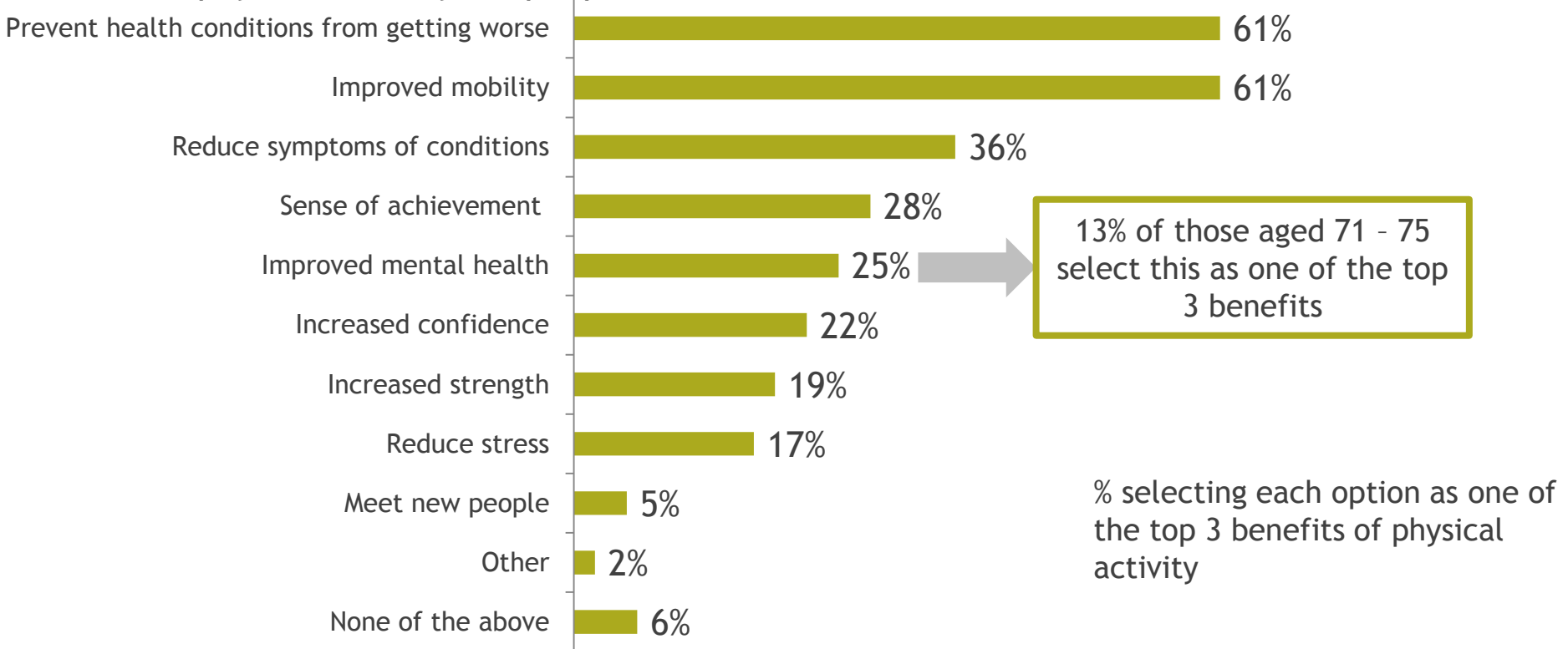
Multiple LTCs, Male, Depth interview

*“[When I went swimming] I really enjoyed it. It was a social occasion.”*

Multiple LTCs, Female, Depth interview

# In contrast, survey respondents say preventing conditions from deteriorating & improved mobility are the top benefits

## Benefits of physical activity for people with LTCs



- Differences may well be attributable to the different samples in the two research strands. As noted, qualitative participants with LTCs are extremely inactive, and in some cases housebound, and many have “given up”. In contrast those with LTCs in the quantitative are relatively active
- In addition, the survey provided respondents with a pre-coded list of benefits; qualitative responses were unprompted

Q. The following are some benefits that people with long-term conditions might get from doing physical activity. Please select the biggest benefit that you think people with long-term conditions might get. Base: All (n=323)



# Message testing



# Approach to message testing

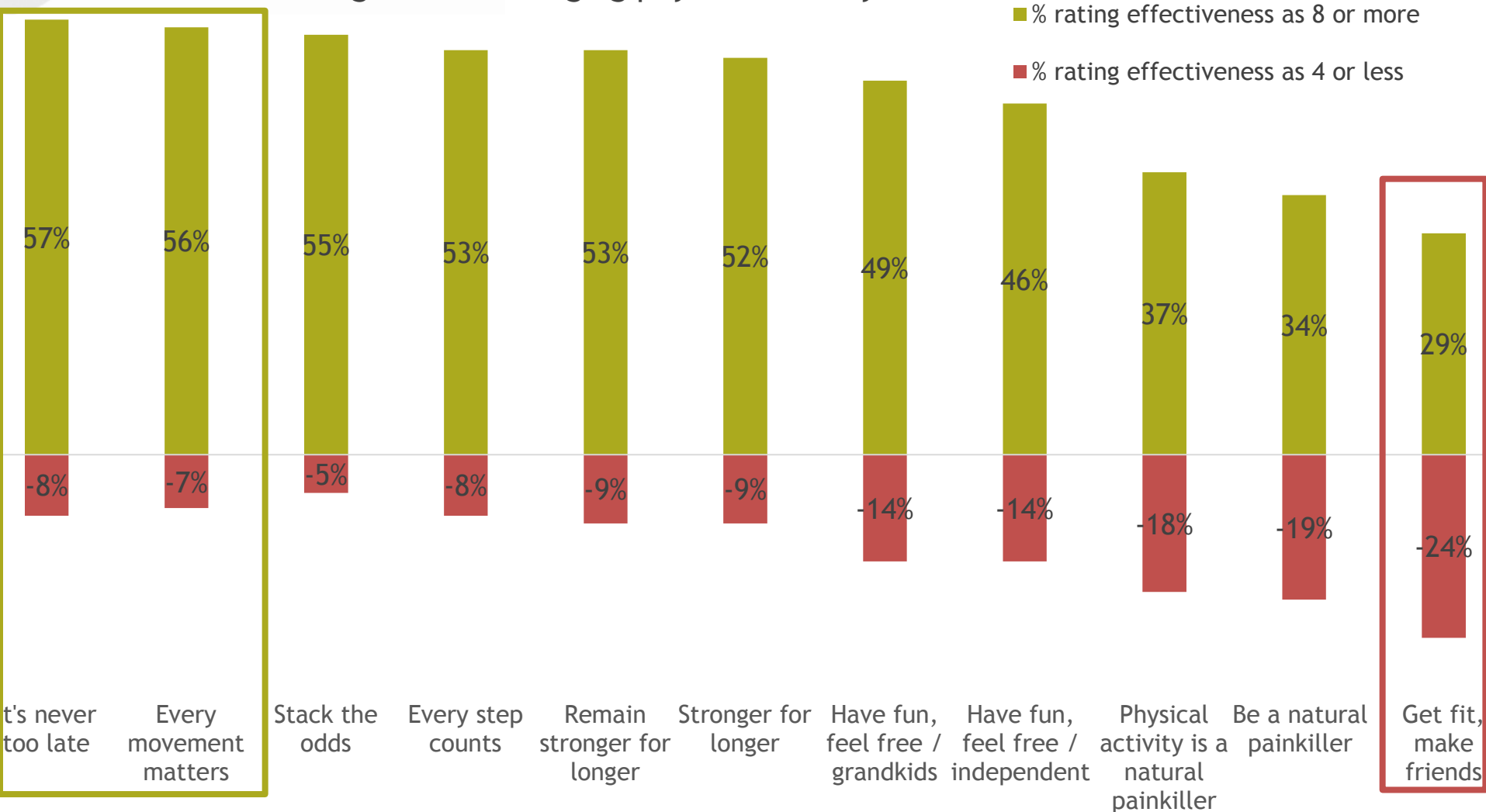
- The message development workshop produced a suite of messages to take forward for testing
- These were tested with participants in the focus groups to understand which messages work well, and which work less well, and the reasons for this
- The messages identified as the most or least effective were then carried through to the poll for a further round of testing
- A complete list of messages tested in the groups can be found in Appendix 2

# Messages tested quantitatively

Full message	Abbreviation
Every step counts. Small increases in physical activity, like walking to the bus stop, can have a big impact on your health.	Every step counts
Every movement matters. Any increase in physical activity, no matter how small, can have big benefits.	Every movement matters
It's never too late to start getting active. Everyone benefits from moving about more, regardless of how old they are or what their health is like.	It's never too late
Remain stronger for longer. Physical activity can manage your symptoms and keep you mobile.	Remain stronger for longer
Stronger for longer. Physical activity can prevent your health from getting worse.	Stronger for longer
Get fit, make friends. Starting a new physical activity can help you meet new people. See what is available in your area.	Get fit, make friends
Have fun and feel free. Physical activity can help you stay strong, so you can do the things you want to do, like get around by yourself, or play with the grandkids.	Have fun and feel free / grandkids
Have fun and feel free. Physical activity can help you stay strong and remain independent.	Have fun feel free / independent
Stack the odds in your favour. Even small amount of physical activity can bring long-term benefits for your health and wellbeing.	Stack the odds
Physical activity is a natural painkiller. Being more active can help manage your pain.	Physical activity is a natural painkiller
Be a natural painkiller. Regular physical activity can help manage your pain.	Be a natural painkiller

# Rating messages out of 10, “It’s never too late” and “Every movement matters” do best; “Get fit” does worst

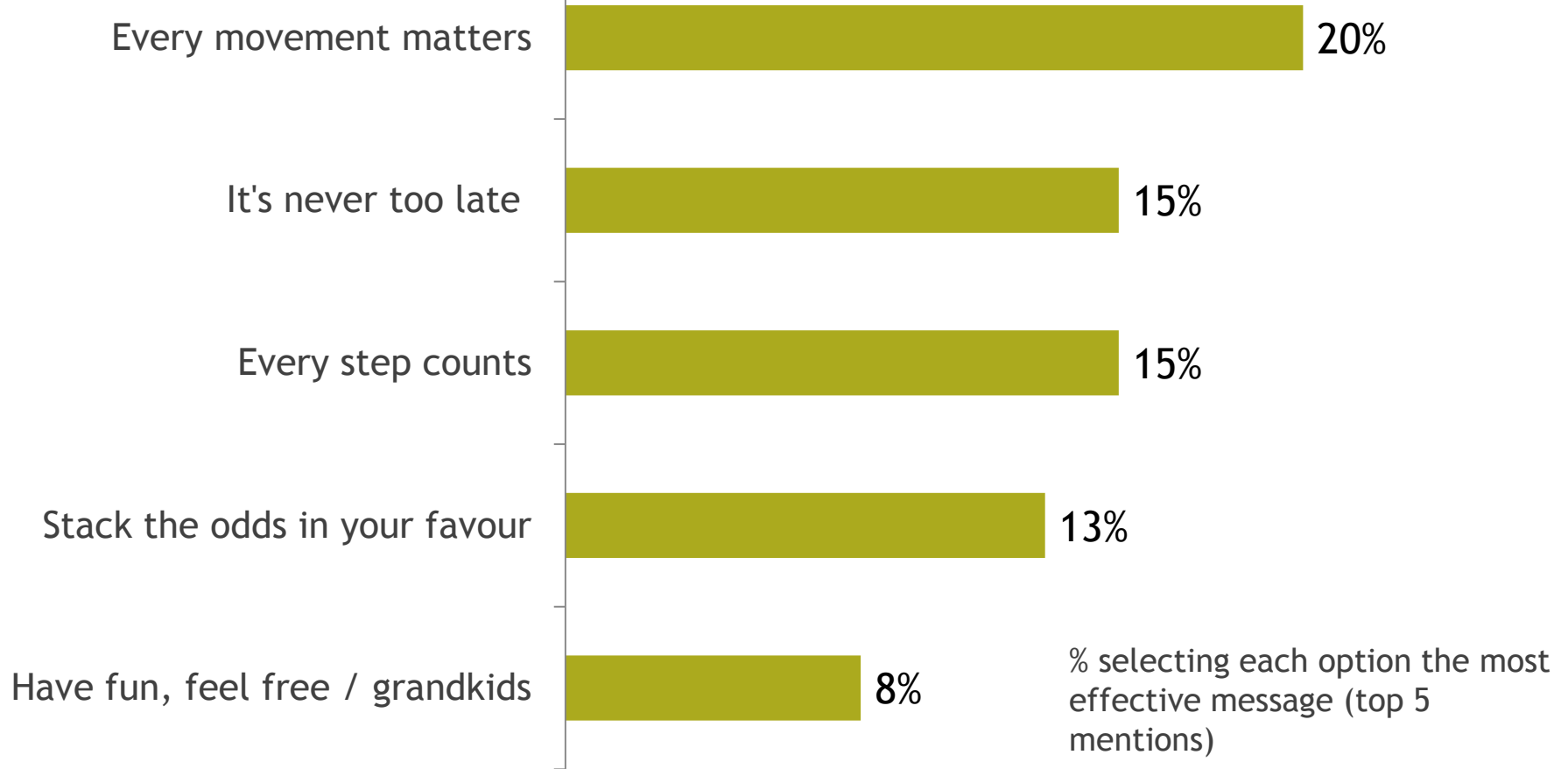
Effectiveness of messages in encouraging physical activity



Q. Please look at each of the statements below, and say how effective you think each one would be at encouraging people with long-term conditions to engage in physical activity. Please give your answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is extremely effective, 0 is extremely ineffective and 5 is in the middle. Base: All (n=323)

# Asked to select the *most* effective message, the same messages come out on top

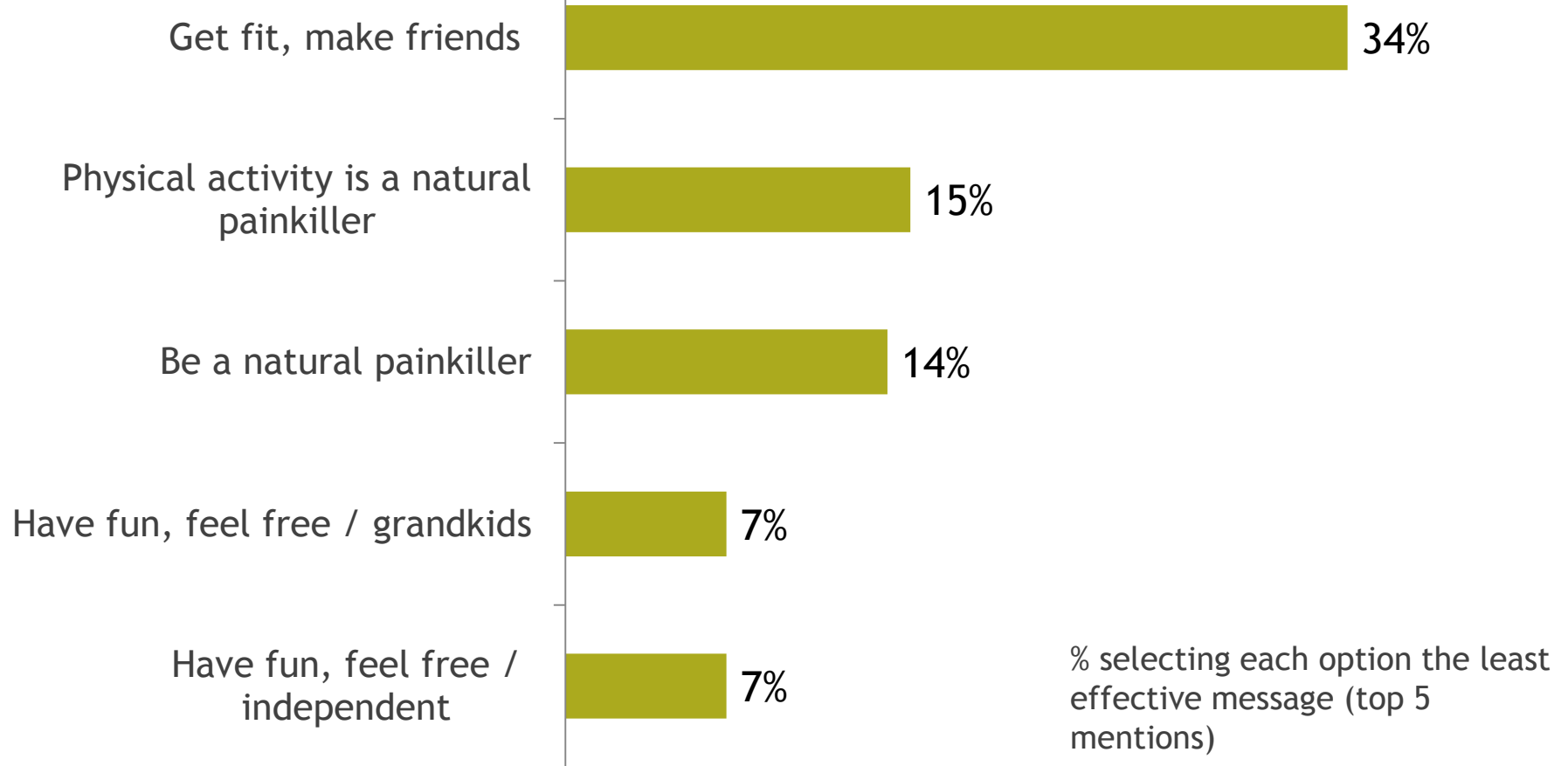
Most effective message



Q. Looking at the same statements again, which one do you think would be most effective in encouraging people with long-term conditions to engage in physical activity? Base: All (n=323)

# Similarly, asked to select the *least* effective message, “Get fit” performs worst

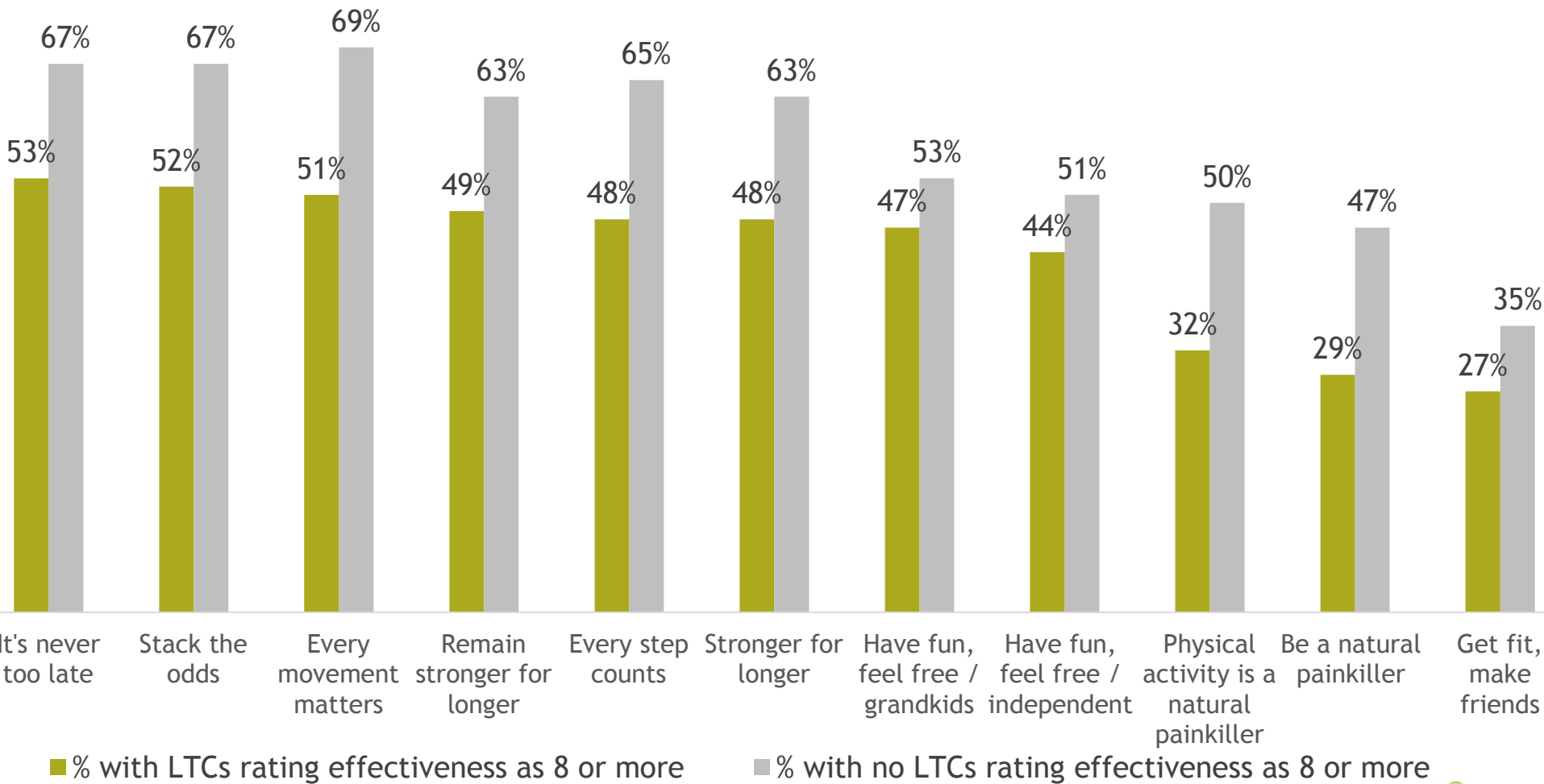
## Least effective message



Q. Looking at the same statements again, which one do you think would be least effective in encouraging people with long-term conditions to engage in physical activity? Base: All (n=323)

# Those with LTCs are consistently more negative about the effectiveness of messages than those without - but the pecking order is largely unchanged

Effectiveness of messages in encouraging physical activity by LTC / no LTC



Q. Please look at each of the statements below, and say how effective you think each one would be at encouraging people with long-term conditions to engage in physical activity. Please give your answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is extremely effective, 0 is extremely ineffective and 5 is in the middle. Base: All (n=323)



What makes a successful message?

# Successful messages speak to everyone, regardless of ability or demographic

- ✓ Provide reassurance that anyone can do physical activity
  - ✓ Without specifically singling out the very incapacitated
- ✓ Encourage those who may have given up
- ✓ Use inclusive, unintimidating language e.g. “everyone”, “active” or “mobile”

*Everyone benefits from moving about more, regardless of how old they are, or what their health is like*

*It's never too late to start getting active*



# Successful messages combine positivity with realism to sound credible

- ✓ Communicate the health benefits of physical activity
- ✓ But also recognise that some people's ability to engage may be limited
- ✓ And provide reassurance that even a small amount of physical activity will bring benefits
  - ✓ Setting the bar low (e.g. "just 10 minutes a day") ensures that the very inactive are not "frightened off"
- ✓ And concrete suggestions for actions they could take e.g. walking to the bus stop

*Even small amounts of physical activity can bring long-term benefits for your health and wellbeing*

*Every step counts*

*Small increases in activity, like walking to the bus stop, can have a big impact on your health*

# Successful messages speak to people's aspirations for their own lives

- ✓ Recognise that, in addition to health, people with LTCs might have a range of reasons for wanting to be more active
  - ✓ Being able to remain independent
  - ✓ Being able to spend time with their families
- ✓ And tap into these aspirations to motivate people

*Physical activity... can keep you mobile*

*Physical activity can help you stay strong and remain independent*

*Physical activity can help you stay strong so you can... play with the grandkids*



Why do weaker messages not work so well?

# Weaker messages challenge people's lived experiences

X Suggest benefits of physical activity that people do not experience or expect

X That it will reduce or help manage pain

X That it will be fun

X It is not for most - and they do not expect it to be

X That they will get “fit”

X Feels unrealistic for most

X These messages therefore lack credibility

*Be a natural painkiller*

*Regular physical activity can help manage your pain*

*Have fun, feel free*

*Get fit, make friends*

# Weaker messages are patronising

X Make assumptions about individuals' conditions or symptoms

x By referring to “your symptoms” or “your condition”

X Assume individuals lack knowledge or understanding of their own condition

x By using phrases such as “Did you know...?”

X Imply that people with LTCs' lives are currently unhappy or unsatisfactory

x Or that they are in some way the “prisoners” of their conditions

X Use excessively colloquial or “matey” language

x E.g. “grandkids”

*Physical activity is a natural painkiller*

*Being more active can help manage your pain*

*Starting a new physical activity can help you meet new people*

*Have fun, feel free*

# Weaker messages are bossy

- X Tone and language instructs, rather than suggesting or encouraging
  - X E.g. “Be a....” or “See what...”
- X Appears to threaten negative consequences of not engaging in physical activity, rather than focusing on the benefits

*Starting a new physical activity can help you meet new people. See what is available in your area*

*Be a natural painkiller*

*Physical activity can prevent your health from getting worse*



# Words to use and words to lose

# Words that work

- ✓ Small increase
- ✓ Any increase
- ✓ Small amounts
- ✓ Achievable goals
- ✓ Active
- ✓ Mobile
- ✓ Independent
- ✓ Stronger
- ✓ Benefits
- ✓ Health
- ✓ Wellbeing
- ✓ Everyone
- ✓ Never too late
- ✓ Family

*“Active is better than exercise or physical activity. It’s not as hard.”*

Multiple LTCs, Female, Focus Group

*“I like ‘It’s never too late.’ If you’ve never done it then you can still start, even if it is small amounts.”*

Multiple LTCs, Female, Focus Group Attribution



# Words that work less well

- X Manage pain
- X Painkiller
- X Manage your symptoms
- X Fit
- X Fun
- X Feel free
- X Reclaim
- X Did you know?

*“It’s not fun for everyone. Not everyone likes exercise.”*

Multiple LTCs, Female, Focus Group

*“I don’t like ‘Did you know?’ it challenges my intelligence.”*

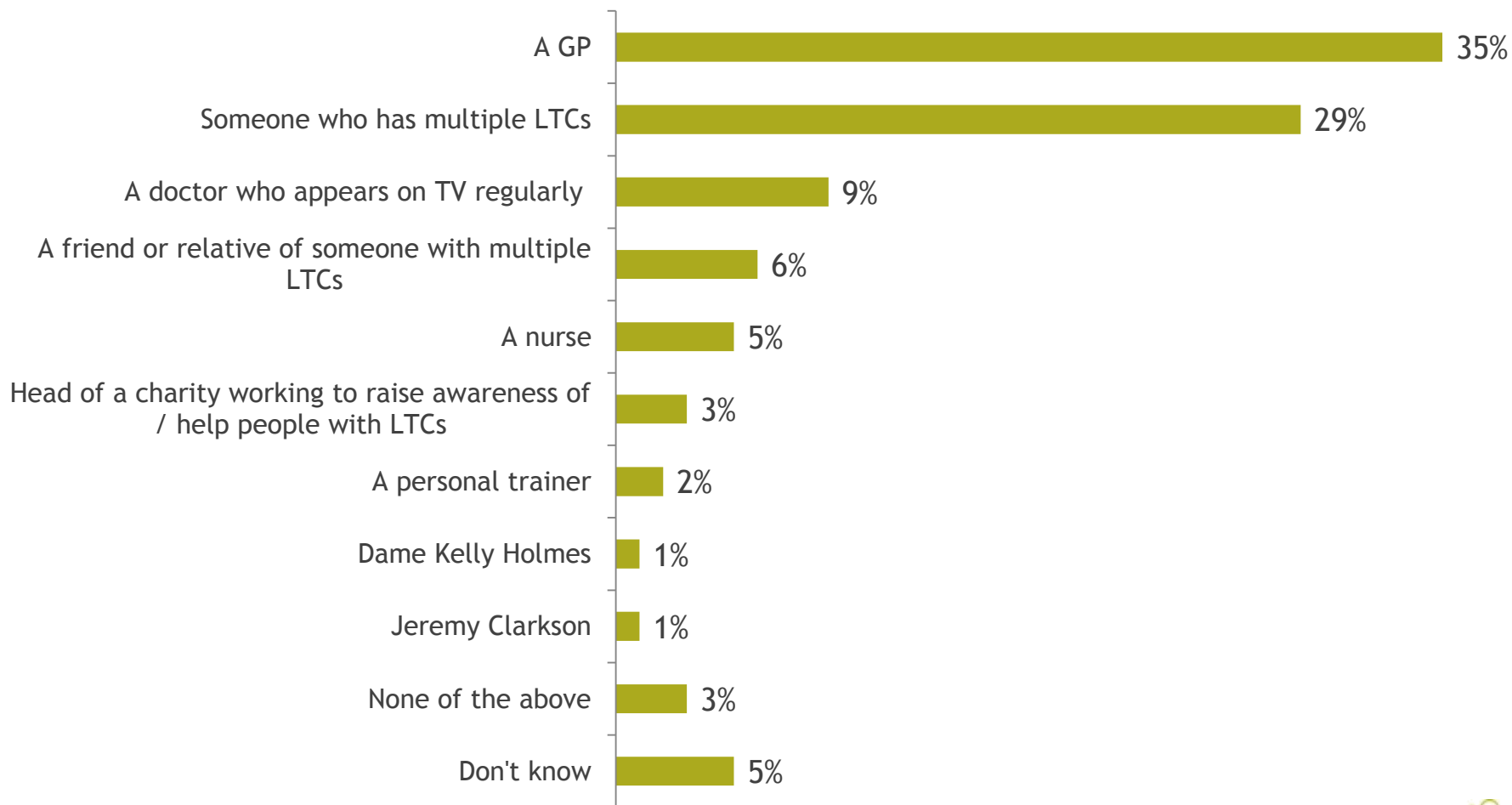
Multiple LTCs, Male, Focus Group



# Spokespeople

# GPs and those with LTCs are best-placed to talk about physical activity

Best-placed people to talk about why people with LTCs should do physical activity



Q. Which of the following people, if any, do you think would be best to talk about why people with long-term conditions should engage in physical activity? Base: All with a long-term condition (n=216)

# Qualitative participants say this is because they are credible and relatable

- People with LTCs and GPs were also seen as good spokespeople in the qualitative research
  - GPs have a broad range of experience, and are therefore well-placed to offer balanced and informed advice
    - Many participants also have a good relationship with their GP, meaning that they are a trusted source of information
      - Although those with negative experiences of HCPs were more skeptical about their ability to empathise / give the right advice
  - Those with LTCs will be able to draw on their own personal experiences to inspire others
    - Shared experiences make them relatable
- Those who performed least well are felt to lack these key qualities
  - Dame Kelly Holmes and personal trainers are extremely fit, and will not understand the challenges faced by those with LTCs
  - Jeremy Clarkson is felt to be motivated primarily by self-interest and therefore lacks credibility
    - And is unhealthy

*“Because it is someone who is suffering as well you can relate to them.”*

Multiple LTCs, Female,  
Focus Group

*“[Jeremy Clarkson] No! He’s a fat slob. He’s arrogant. He would be saying the message and another thing under his breath.”*

Multiple LTCs, Male,  
Focus Group



# Recommendations and key insights

# Key insights

1

Even the most incapacitated people we spoke to say that they want to be more physically active - indicating a valuable messaging opportunity for the Richmond Group

2

Both exercise and physical activity are seen as “not for people like me” amongst inactive participants with multiple long-term conditions

However, whilst the broad understanding of both are similar, the negative connotations (e.g. pain) of “exercise” are more top-of-mind, whilst “physical activity” has associations with tasks such as housework and gardening

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The strongest barriers to physical activity are internal and relate to the symptoms experienced by those with LTCs (e.g. pain, breathlessness)

However, the most commonly identified benefits (e.g. preventing conditions from deteriorating) do not address these barriers. Consequently, messages claiming to improve symptoms are dismissed

# Key insights

4

Successful messages have 3 key attributes:

- They speak to everybody, regardless of their demographic or current levels of activity
- They combine positivity about the benefits of physical activity with realism about what is achievable, giving them credibility
- They speak to people's aspirations for their own lives, for example spending time with their grandchildren, or being independent

5

Weaker messages also have 3 key attributes:

- They challenge the lived experiences of those with LTCs
- They are interpreted as patronising (e.g. by making assumptions about individuals' conditions or assuming that their life is in some way circumscribed)
- Their tone is bossy, with language that instructs rather than encourages

# Recommendations

- “It’s never too late” and “Every movement matters” are the most plausible messages to use in any campaign
  - Whilst many of the messages tested performed well, these consistently came out on top in both the qualitative and the quantitative research
- To support people in understanding exactly what physical activity they might do, it might be advantageous to combine the first half of “Every movement matters” with the second half of “Every step counts”
  - To create a message that reads “Every movement matters. Small increases in physical activity, like walking to the bus stop, can have a big impact on your health”
- Any campaign should, as far as possible, speak of “being active” rather than “physical activity”
  - “Physical activity” has fewer negative connotations than “exercise” but is still seen as “not for me” by those who are extremely inactive



## In their own words....

*“Gradually build up physical activity, one step at a time*

*Set yourself goals you can achieve each day, then stretch yourself one step more when you achieve your goals.*

*Don't be depressed if you can't reach your goal - start again tomorrow”*  
Online respondent

*“Physical activity can benefit your health*

*Everyone can do some form of exercise to have a better quality of life*

*Age is not a problem as all exercises count”*  
Multiple LTCs, Female, Focus Group

*“It's not too late to start exercise*

*Maybe we could try small amounts first, like a walk to the shops and take the bus back, or get off a few bus stops sooner and walk the rest of the way, and increase it each time”*

Online respondent

*Imagine you were trying to persuade someone with a long-term condition to become more physically active. What would you tell them?*



# Appendix 1

# Appendix 1: Online poll sample structure

Sample structure		
Gender	Male	50%
	Female	50%
Age	45 - 54	13%
	55 - 60	21%
	61 - 65	20%
	66 - 70	21%
	70 +	24%
SEG	AB	37%
	C1	27%
	C2	11%
	DE	25%
GOR	Scotland / North England	33%
	Wales / Midlands	29%
	South	38%



## Appendix 2

# Appendix 2: Messages tested

<p>Be a natural painkiller Regular physical activity can help manage your pain</p>	<p>Physical activity is a natural painkiller. Being more active can help manage your pain</p>	
<p>Every step counts. Small increases in activity, like walking to the bus stop, can have a big impact on your health.</p>	<p>Every movement matters. Any increase in your physical activity, no matter how small, can have big benefits.</p>	
<p>I've done my 10 minutes of physical activity for the day. I walked to the shops to get the paper.</p>	<p>I've done my 10 minutes of physical activity for the day. I did the hoovering.</p>	
<p>Did you know what just 10 minutes of physical activity a day can help manage symptoms of your condition?</p>	<p>Did you know that getting up and moving for just 10 minutes a day can bring long-term health benefits?</p>	<p>Did you know that it doesn't matter if you can't do much physical activity at first? Setting achievable goals can be a good way to get active and build up your strength</p>
<p>What do you know about how to manage your health? Just 10 minutes of physical activity can have a big impact on your condition.</p>	<p>Stack the odds in your favour. Even small amounts of physical activity can bring long-term benefits for your health and wellbeing.</p>	
<p>It's never too late to start getting active. Everyone benefits from moving about more, regardless of how old they are or what their health is like.</p>	<p>It's never too late to start getting active. Everyone benefits from moving about more, regardless of how old they are or what their health is like.</p>	

# Appendix 2: Messages tested

Someone like me can take my grandkids to the playground.	Someone like me can walk to the corner shop to buy a pint of milk.
It's free to get my 10 minutes of exercise a day. I have a walk in the my local park.	It's free to get my 10 minutes of exercise a day. I carry my groceries home from the shops.
Remain stronger for longer. Physical activity can manage your symptoms and keep you mobile.	Stronger for longer. Physical activity can manage your symptoms and keep you mobile.
Did you know that physical activity can tackle depression and help people feel happy in themselves?	Did you know that people who do regular physical activity tend to have fewer trips to the doctors?
Have fun and feel free. Physical activity can help you stay strong and remain independent.	Have fun and feel free. Physical activity can help you stay strong, so you can do the things you want to do, like get around by yourself, or play with the grandkids.
Reclaim your freedom. Becoming more active will help you become more independent.	
Family time is more fun when you're out together in the fresh air.	Family time is more fun when you can play with your grandkids in the park.
Get fit, make friends. Starting a new physical activity can help you meet new people.	