

Keeping Active

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Thinking about getting some exercise, but too intimidated or discouraged? Don't be! As you get older, living an active lifestyle is more important than ever. Exercise gets the blood flowing, which is always a good thing. Staying fit helps seniors maintain good health, boost energy, and even improve overall mood. No matter what age, health, or fitness level you are, you can always benefit from moving more.

Exercise is the key to staying strong, energetic, and healthy as you get older. It can help you manage the symptoms of illness and pain, maintain your independence, and even reverse some of the symptoms of aging. You can always benefit from a little exercise. And exercise doesn't necessarily mean strenuous workouts or trips to your local gym. Exercise is just about adding more movement and activity in your life, whether it be big or small. Whether you are in good health or dealing with an illness – even if you are housebound or chair-bound – there are many ways to exercise to improve your health.

For seniors, their exercise plan does not have to be as rigorous as it once was. Doctors usually recommend a light to mild, balanced exercise plan that mixes different types of workouts to increase overall body health. These different types of workouts resonate from the four building blocks of senior fitness, which are: *strength, endurance, flexibility, and balance.*

By practicing these types of exercises, seniors can become healthier and better maintain independence. Of the four main types of exercise for seniors, strength is the most thought of. Strength is important because it builds muscle and helps prevent loss of bone mass, which in turn makes day-to-day activities, such as getting in and out of a car or lifting objects, much easier. Endurance also promotes independence by

lessening fatigue and shortness of breath. Endurance can be trained by increasing your heart rate for an extended period of time; this can be anything from walking, swimming, biking, etc. The two less known, but just as important, types of exercises that seniors are advised to partake in are flexibility and balance. Flexibility is necessary as well since it helps keep your body limber and allows more freedom of movement which is helpful for ordinary physical activities (i.e. looking behind you while driving, tying shoes, shampooing your hair, playing with grandchildren). Balance may not seem important, but according to the NIH (National Institutes of Health), US hospitals have more than 300,000 cases of broken hips each year, many of which are the result of seniors falling. By improving your balance, you improve your stability and posture and reduce the risk of falling. Both flexibility and balance can be trained through simple stretches or activities such as yoga or tai chi.

But before initiating your regiment for a better lifestyle, there are some precautions that you must take. Before starting an exercise program, it is important that you receive medical clearance from your doctor, especially if you have a preexisting condition. Be aware of the exercises that you can safely perform and the ones that you cannot. It is also unsafe to go "all out" early in your exercise program. Overworking your body in a short period of time can be harmful. Instead, build up your exercise little by little. Try exercising in short increments, then taking a short break before restarting again. If ever during an exercise a problem occurs, stop immediately. Exercise should never hurt; if you ever begin to feel dizzy, develop chest pain, break out in a cold sweat, or experience pain call your doctor right away



(also stop if a joint is red, swollen, or tender to the touch). And remember to always keep water handy.

Another important tip is to make working out fun. Exercise should not be just another task on your to-do list. If you don't enjoy what you are doing, you become lazy and become less committed. But, like stated before, exercise is more important as you get older, and you cannot afford to get discouraged from being active. By implementing things that you enjoy into your workout, exercising becomes more pleasurable. For example, you can listen to music while lifting weights, take a scenic route during a light jog, etc. By keeping your workouts fresh and fun, it becomes easier to stay active.

Living an active lifestyle is always a healthy decision, but it's even more vital the older you get. By sticking to a light, balanced exercise plan, you can stay healthier and reap the benefits of an active lifestyle. So try to have fun with exercise and it will make you feel a lot better both physically and mentally.