

# Active Seniors Enjoy Life More

Good news for older adults: part of the prescription for a healthier, better retirement is exercise. Physical activity protects against declining health and fitness and adds years to your life. Join the growing number of older adults who are actively demonstrating that exercise helps keep a body strong.

## The Best Retirement Is an Active One

Did you know that moderate-intensity physical activity can help you live longer and reduce health problems? Regular exercise helps control blood pressure, body weight and cholesterol levels, and cuts the risk for hardening of the arteries, heart attack and stroke. It conditions muscles, tendons, ligaments and bones to help fight osteoporosis, keep your body more limber and stabilize your joints, thus lowering the risk of everyday injury. It also improves digestion and is good for managing low-back pain, arthritis and diabetes. Regular physical activity helps you maintain your independence.

And recently, there's been more research that suggests an active lifestyle lowers the risk of some cancers. But perhaps the best reason for incorporating regular exercise into your life is that you'll feel better. Exercise helps you sleep better and manage stress better, and gives you more energy to enjoy work and play.

## Fitness Is Golden

A good exercise program includes cardiovascular exercise, muscular conditioning and flexibility exercises. The best cardiovascular exercises for seniors are non-jarring, such as walking, swimming and cycling. Start with a light regimen and gradually build up to a total of at least 30 minutes of activity on most, preferably all, days of the week. Playing with children, gardening, dancing and housecleaning are other ways to incorporate activity into your daily routine.

Strengthening exercises such as lifting light weights (or even household items such as canned foods or milk jugs) help to maintain your muscle mass and promote bone health. Plus, research suggests that adults older than 50 years who do not perform resistance training lose nearly 1/4 pound of muscle mass per year.

Since muscle mass is directly related to how many calories your body burns each day, resistance training is important for weight management. And strong leg and hip muscles help to reduce the risk of falls, a cause of considerable disability among older adults. Aim to participate in resistance training at least two days per week, making sure to exercise all major muscle groups through a full range of motion.

End each workout with stretching exercises to help maintain your mobility and range of motion and decrease your risk for injury.

## A Few Safety Tips

Always remember to keep safety in mind when exercising.

- Wear comfortable, well-fitting shoes.
- Avoid outdoor activities in extreme temperatures.
- Drink plenty of fluids to stay well hydrated.
- Listen to your body when determining an appropriate exercise intensity (and keep in mind that monitoring intensity using heart rate isn't accurate if you are on heart-rate-altering medications such as most medications for hypertension).
- Be aware of danger signs. Stop activity and call your doctor or 911 if you experience any of the following: pain or pressure in your chest, arms, neck or jaw; feeling lightheaded, nauseated or weak;



becoming short of breath; developing pain in your legs, calves or back; or feeling like your heart is beating too fast or skipping beats.

### Discover the Exercise You Like Best

The best way to keep fit is to choose exercises you enjoy. Favorites among some older adults include aqua aerobics, yoga, Pilates, tai chi, line dancing, square dancing, ballroom dancing or simply walking the dog. You may enjoy group exercise classes, since they offer an opportunity to socialize and develop friendships.

When you're deciding on a class or program, make sure the instructor is certified by an accredited professional organization such as the American Council on Exercise and has completed specialty training in senior health and fitness. And remember the other elements that contribute to good health in your golden years: A well-balanced diet, not smoking and seeing your doctor regularly.

Look at your retirement or senior years as an opportunity to do things you have never done before. Most of all, enjoy yourself!

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