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The Many Benefits of Exercise: Especially for Seniors

Don't Tarnish Your Golden Years – Active Seniors Glow with Health

Fitness is important for everyone, but it is especially important for seniors. If you've decided to begin exercising and leading an active lifestyle then you've taken the first step toward great health. Even if you've led a fairly sedentary lifestyle until now, you can start being active at any age. You might check with your doctor, though, just to be sure you're ready to get started.

You should certainly check with your doctor if you have heart problems, you feel chest pain when you are active or at any other time, you regularly lose your balance, you have difficulties with your bones or joints that might get worse with increased activity, or you take prescription drugs for serious health issues. Once you get the okay from your doctor, you're ready to start building your active lifestyle.

The best way to begin creating an active lifestyle is with a fitness plan. Seniors should focus on four main areas of fitness. First, set your sights on endurance. These are activities that can strengthen your heart rate and breathing over a long period of time. Activities like walking, biking, running, stair climbing, hiking, team sports, and swimming fit in this category. You should try to engage in thirty minutes of endurance exercises each day.

The next main area of fitness you should focus on is strength. Strength building activities help build muscle, reinforce joints, and add to bone density over a period of time. Activities like working with a weight machine, enrolling in a martial arts class, or rowing will help to build strength. You should try to build strength training exercises into your active lifestyle plan three to five days each week.

Another area of fitness you should focus on is flexibility. These activities, like daily stretching exercises, can increase your ability to move. Other activities that fall into this category are yoga and various forms of dancing. Build at least ten minutes of stretching into your routine every day. The final area of focus is balance. Balance exercises can keep you from debilitating falls. Balance workouts can include Tai Chi and general posture exercises. This component should be built into your other workout routines.

Sometimes it is difficult to stay motivated with your fitness plan. There are a number of things that might make you want to quit working out. If you are bored with your activities, you are more likely to stop doing them. That is why it is essential to choose activities that you like. If you hate swimming, don't enroll in water aerobics. Another reason people leave their fitness plan is a lack of time. If you don't make your workout a priority, you won't make time for it.

You should also vary your fitness routine. Doing the same activity over and over again can get incredibly boring. However, if you walk two days a week and go to the gym three days a week, you might stay interested. Challenging yourself can also infuse life into your fitness routine. Plan a long term goal and then try to reach it. Your goal could be something as complex as a triathlon, or as simple as walking for forty minutes a day instead of fifteen.

Choosing someone to workout with may also help you stick with it. If you don't have a neighbor you would enjoy exercising with, try joining a local health club or mall walkers group. Chances are good that you might find someone to talk with and exercise with. Finally, be sure to reward yourself often. Think about what you would look forward to, then build in a special rewards day if you've met your fitness goals for the month.

Exercise isn't the only way to stay healthy, though. It is also important to lead an active lifestyle. For example, choose to take a vacation that involves whitewater rafting instead of sitting by the pool and eating junk food. Also, instead of spending every night in front of the television, try going dancing a few nights a week. The final key to a healthy lifestyle is nutrition. Read labels and try to keep a food diary. It will help you keep track of whether or not you are eating well. Active lifestyles are an important building block to good health.

Slow and Steady – A Sensible Senior's Workout

Most aging adults don't get enough physical activity. Exercise, though, can improve health impairments and prevent some diseases. It can also improve mood and emotional well being. The keys, though, to a sensible senior workout are to take it slowly and keep it up. Older people need to find a realistic mild to moderate enjoyable program.

Before starting any exercise program, seniors should consult a doctor to ensure they are fit enough to engage in the program of their choice. You should be familiar with your options before you choose a program. Some people enjoy a structured class, while others like to schedule themselves. Some seniors enjoy a workout with a friend, like a mall walking club, and others enjoy a solitary workout. Moreover, you need to decide if you enjoy an outdoor or indoor workout environment and things like exercise for short or long periods of time. There are several things to remember as you prepare to start your exercise program.

First, start slowly. Engaging in too much activity right away isn't good for anyone, especially seniors. Starting too quickly can lead to soreness and lack of interest in the workout. It might be best to start by recording your activities for a week. For example, it is a good idea to record how much time you spend sedentary versus how much time you spend exercising. That will help to establish a baseline from which to build a strong exercise program. Next, stop at the point of exhaustion or when pain is involved.

The adage "no pain, no gain" doesn't apply to seniors. Movements that involve jerking or bounding should be completely avoided. Also, sessions should be fun. No one can stick with a workout that is boring. Water should be consumed regularly during a workout. It will aid in keeping the body hydrated. Finally, as your body adapts to moderate exercise, you can make your activities more challenging.

There are a number of different activities seniors can choose from to build an exercise program. Most seniors choose to engage in endurance activities. These are exercises that build heart rate and breathing over a period of time. Some examples of endurance activities are jogging, swimming, and walking. In addition to these types of exercises, seniors should engage in some

measure of strength training, as bones become weak if they aren't subjected to some weight bearing exercise. Strength training should be included in your workout at least twice a week.

It is important to start with a minimum amount of weight and gradually add weight. During strength training, complete eight to fifteen repetitions in a row before waiting a minute and doing it again. It is especially important to remember to stretch after strength training exercises. You may have some soreness when you are finished, but you should never feel pain.

As your workout begins, there are a number of points to keep in mind. If you will be bending, bend from the hips and keep your back straight. Bending from the waist can cause spine fractures. Also, build endurance gradually. Begin with as little as five minutes of activity if you need to. It may take a long period of time, possibly months, to go from a sedentary lifestyle to working out on a regular basis.

The eventual goal is to engage in thirty minutes of endurance activities each day. You should concentrate on the major muscles in the legs, chest, and back. This focus will lead to higher benefits from your exercise program. Pay attention to clothing choice when getting started. Shoes should be sturdy and offer good arch support. Clothing should be comfortable and fit well.

It is important to remember that an exercise program can only work if you stay with it. There are several things that might encourage continued participation. You must think that the activity you are engaging in is worthy and that you will benefit from it. Additionally, you must feel as if you are doing the activities correctly and safely. You should have regular access to the activity and be able to fit the activities into your daily schedule. Moreover, it is important to feel your activities don't impose on you financially or socially. Finally, you should be experiencing few negative consequences from your activities. Setting yourself up to succeed from the start will only help you keep a steady pace.

Turn Back the Clock on Aging – Integrate Exercise into Your Daily Life

Physical fitness allows the body to perform to its full capacity. Fitness helps us appear, feel, and act to our full potential. Exercise is essentially the capability to complete everyday responsibilities energetically and actively, with energy remaining at the end of the day for appreciation of other activities. Fitness means being able to handle situations where the average individual might fail. It is the core of excellent health.

Physical fitness affects the entire body including the heart, lungs, and muscles. It also involves emotional well being. If your body feels good, your mind does too. Exercise, though, doesn't have to be a chore. Integrating it into your daily life can make physical fitness a fun and rewarding activity to look forward to.

The first step to integration is to make physical fitness a priority. People are very good at contradicting themselves. Many people say they'd like to exercise, but they continually choose not to. One reason for this contradiction is the impractical ideas people have about exercise. People believe a number of lies about exercise including the idea that exercise might help them

lose weight fast, change the body extensively, or that keeping the motivation to exercise will be simple. These lies only make sticking with an exercise routine more difficult.

One thing you can do to combat this problem is to design a plan. First, set a reasonable exercise goal, and list the steps that you will need to take in order to reach that goal. Next, set small goals that might help you reach your big goal. Then decide to force yourself to follow through no matter what the excuses are. You may find it easier to do this by holding yourself responsible through a daily exercise journal or an exercise buddy.

Try following your progress each week. At the end of the week, sit down and decide what worked, what didn't, and what you should consider doing different next week. Remember to reward yourself. We thrive on positive reinforcement, so a reward for working out even though you were tired is a good way to get into the habit of working out. It is, though, equally important not to beat yourself up if you feel you must miss a session. There are going to be times that exercise cannot be your priority, and it's important to remember that consistence is the key to good health. Setting a workout schedule will help your success.

There are also several tips to including exercise in your daily routine. First, try to get up a little earlier in the morning and do a quick workout whether it's walking or basic calisthenics. Second, when you get to your destination, whether it is work or the grocery store, try to park further away from the entrance than you normally would. This will force you to walk a bit further.

Next, if you have to take an elevator, try taking the stairs instead. Even if it's just one flight, it can help raise your heart rate a bit. Also, if you have to sit for a long period of time, it might help to spend a few minutes each hour stretching or walking around. Save a few minutes before your lunch to take a quick walk or do a quick round of weight training. If afternoon is your sleepy time, when you begin to feel lethargic, take a walk to a friend's house to sit and say hello for a moment.

Spend your afternoons in the garden. Mowing, weeding, and gardening are great ways to get exercise without even realizing it. Clean the house. Vacuuming and dusting can also be a way to sneak in some workout time. While in the car or sitting anywhere, you can strengthen your abdominal muscles by slowly pulling your stomach toward your back and holding it for five seconds. While you are waiting for dinner to finish cooking, try some light strength training in the kitchen. Grab some light weights and do a few curls while you are waiting for that oven timer to go off.

It's also a good idea to plan leisure activities that involve exercise. Spend an evening dancing instead of seeing a movie. Take a walk through the botanical gardens. Go golfing. Before you hit the sack at night, try mentally planning some formal workout time into your schedule the next day. It may help you stick with the routine.

Exercise - A Natural Sleep Aid for Seniors

There are a number of reasons why exercise, particularly if performed at the right time of day, is considered the most positive sleep aid for seniors. None, however, are more significant than

the fact that exercise is a completely natural form of aid. But before discussing why exercise is such a great sleep aid, it is important to examine both the definition of insomnia and the reasons that people suffer from this affliction.

At its basic level, insomnia is defined as a difficulty to either fall or stay asleep, or to experience sleep that seems inadequate or fails to produce the refreshing feeling that sleep normally provides, despite the length of time spent sleeping. Insomnia is not considered a disease, rather it is a symptom that is thought to have numerous, quite different causes. Of the types of things that can lead to patterns of insomnia, physicians note that physical disorders, drinking large amounts of alcohol in the evening, emotional problems, and stress are at the forefront.

Most often, it is the emotional issues caused from stress that are at the heart of sleeplessness nights for people. Anxiety, nervousness, depression, or fear will cause restlessness at night, preventing people from first getting to sleep then often causing them to awaken early, their mind filled with these emotional thoughts running through their heads. Research has also shown that sometimes the failure to sleep soundly is simply due to a lack of fatigue.

It is important to note that difficulty falling asleep is common among all age groups, from the very young to the elderly. Data indicates that about 10% of adults have chronic, or regular bouts of insomnia, while about 50% experience insomnia when in fact they are not. Seniors often think they are suffering from severe insomnia when they are not. As we age, we in fact tend to sleep less at night, and begin to catch a catnap during the day. Perhaps most significantly, the period of deep sleep known as REM sleep generally becomes shorter as we age and then eventually disappears. Because of this, seniors awaken far more during night time sleep this is normal and does not indicate a sleep disorder.

Unfortunately, many seniors search out a drug related treatment to insomnia. The intermittent use of drugs as a sleep aid can be helpful, provided they are used as described, intermittently. Most such drugs suggest impact for up to a week at most. Because any drug has specific side effects associated with it, the taking of a drug to induce sleep may lead to some other less than desirable issue for the patient. Finally, most sleep aid drugs require a prescription, adding a doctor's appointment and the cost of the prescription to often already tight budget.

Because exercise affects the body in so many positive ways, it is clearly the most natural option for helping address sleep related issues. Regular exercise will first of all help tire the body physically, ensuring a natural form of fatigue that the body will address with a need to get appropriate rest. The only negative research on physical exercise is that spending time late in the evening can often stimulate the heart and brain too much just prior to the time that people are looking to head to bed. Such exercise has been known to actually keep people awake.

Perhaps the greatest impact from physical exercise on the body's sleep patterns is the effect working out can have on a person's emotional state. Because stress and worry are often the key impediments to sleep, efforts to reduce such stress are critical to eliminate the symptoms that are at the root cause of insomnia.

Activity is shown to improve a person's self-confidence and sense of well being, thereby helping improve a person's overall mood and attitude about life. The natural endorphins that are produced when we exercise help us feel better emotionally and actually reduce feelings of

sadness and depression. Therefore people who exercise regularly sleep better. Their positive emotional state helps them fall asleep more quickly, while their body fatigue level allows them to sleep more deeply and awake less often during the night.

Yet one other way that people who work out regularly bring to the reduction of insomnia is the notion of schedules. People who take their exercise seriously will build it into their daily regiment, ensuring that time is available for this important task. These people also realize that it is important to develop a sleep routine that includes regular bed time hours as well as regular morning routines. By following a regular sleep schedule and getting up at the same time each morning, even if it is a weekends, your body will respond by developing regular sleep habits. Because total nighttime sleeping time tends to decrease with age, older people may sleep better if they go to bed later, get up earlier, or nap less during the day.

Older people experiencing age-related sleep issues are likely to find more long-lasting relief through the use of regular exercise than they ever will by using drug-related sleep aids.

Active Seniors = Active Sex Life

Many people have attached a stereotype to the senior lifestyle which dictates that they no longer want to have sex. If you are a senior, however, you are probably like most other seniors, still enjoying an active sex life. If you are an active senior, you may have noticed little decline in the amount of sex you are having now as compared to twenty years ago.

The stereotypes are just not holding up when it comes to the reality of senior sexuality. There may be some changes to how often it happens or how long it lasts, or even time periods when it does not occur at all, especially if your partner gets sick, but that does not mean that senior sexuality is not as fulfilling. The key to maintaining a fulfilling and active sex life depends on the amount of general, physical activity which you engage in on a regular basis.

Sexual satisfaction seems to mirror the amount of physical activity you have on a day to day basis. If you are not keeping your body active with gardening, bicycling, swimming, walking or some other activity, then you will begin to lose the function power of your body. Just like a car that sits in the garage for a month, so does the body's proverbial battery begin to die out. The energy level of a non-exercising senior diminishes along with the range of motion they have with their limbs and muscles. Their mental alertness and creativity will also suffer the more they remain inert. If the body reacts this way to staying motionless, then seniors and people in general, should expect their sexual functioning to suffer immensely as well.

When an active senior stays fit, they can overcome the natural laziness that would eventually decrease their sexual performance. Seniors that take a walk together will feel refreshed when they come home. The fact that both partners are on the same page is more conducive to them wanting to become intimate. Seniors that go to dance clubs where they square, line, ballroom, or some other kind of dance, can flirt with one another, and be playful and loving while they exercise their bodies.

Seeing your partner active and healthy is one of the strongest elements of physical attraction. The activities do not even have to be shared by both partners. Encouraging your partner to do something physically active that they want to do may give them the time to their self which has them coming home to you refreshed and appreciative of your desire to be intimate. The goal is to make sure that both partners are finding ways to stay fit and healthy. If you golf and your partner swims, you will both come home feeling invigorated and more ready to be sexy than if you had both been sleeping or watching television all day.

Despite the changes that occur with sexual functioning as one becomes a senior, there is still plenty of intimacy and sexuality to experience. Men should not feel inhibited by longer refractory periods and women should not be so about how it may take longer to become lubricated. Physical activity is the best way to counteract any insecurity which may develop about your body as you get older.

Feeling robust because you are swimming, walking or lifting weights gives you the confidence in your body that you might have lost if you did not stay active. If you are insecure about your skin, know that getting your blood flowing through exercise will reduce the appearance of aging, and as a bonus, will help get circulation to the sexual organs. A healthy heart assists sexual functioning and will keep your sex life active.

The sexually active body reflects confidence when it walks talks and wears clothes. Wearing something flattering that makes you feel sexy will be easier with toned arms and legs. Physical activity portrays a special confidence in a senior who allows intimacy and sexuality to be a realistic, frequent event. Seniors that engage in regular sexual activity are also happier in general and that contributes to your overall youthfulness and well-being. There is definitely truth in the statement, "use it or lose it," that should be kept close to the heart. Just like the entire body, sexual functioning requires good circulation, a confident spirit and an active body.

Feeling Younger As You Get Older – How Exercise Keeps You Young

Lack of activity makes us feel lethargic and depressed. If sitting around lets us gets old, then perhaps we should consider that getting up and moving keeps aging on a slower track. There are plenty of ways to keep you moving no matter what age or what condition. You first need to check your attitude and make sure that your preconceptions about being a senior are not getting in the way of your activity. Once you can let go of what you think you should be doing at your age, then you are taking the first step toward feeling younger.

Exercise actually does help us stay younger. On a surface level, getting the blood moving keeps the skin warm, which helps it rejuvenate itself more often. Circulation also keeps the mind sharp and helps ward off dementia. Keeping an active lifestyle is great for keeping us limber. If you have ever met a 70 year-old person who can touch their toes and reach to the third shelf in their kitchen, they will probably tell you that they have always kept themselves active. Staying active is the key to remaining flexible through the senior years.

Yet another benefit to exercising on a regular basis is that it keeps blood flowing through the organs. Along with plenty of water, this process helps remove the toxins through and out of

your body, which means that they do not have time to fester and find ways to break you down. Whether you bicycle, golf, walk, swim, dance, do tai chi or all of the above, you are keeping your heart, organs and brain circulating which keeps the body from slowing down.

Exercise also keeps you young because it helps keep you happy. If you have been through a traumatic time in your life then you may have noticed that fresh wrinkles and extra gray hair are more abundant soon after your life gets back to normal. Day to day unhappiness and bitterness can also speed up the aging process. People who exercise still go through difficult times, but the effect that the body allows this time to have on it is not as severe for them. The activity helps release the stress chemicals which the brain produces and keeps the head more clear so it can cope better. The overall demeanor of people who do physical exercise of some kind at least once or twice a week is not a coincidence. They really do feel better because their body is constantly refreshing itself.

Most exercise can be done with other people, or at least, done in an environment where people like to congregate. Keeping socially active helps motivate the self to commit to social engagements, whether that is the local swim class or a night out square-dancing. Seniors look out for each other and will be asking for you if they don't see you one night. These friendships made through your exercise classes or activities will help you stay young too. Being out and about keeps your mind off yourself and out of routines where you do not see people as often. Take advantage of the variety of activities for seniors at your local clubs and gyms and you will find yourself feeling younger and more alive.

So, perhaps you can accept that the exercising person stays healthier, happier and younger in appearance for longer, but how do you actually feel younger than you are? Think back to the 70 year-old who has never missed out on touching their toes. They are actually ahead of the game for their age. This is bound to make them feel younger.

It would be nice if everyone in their seventies had stayed this flexible and hopefully you can become a role model for the healthy senior and spread the word. If all 70 year-olds were this flexible then it would still be a win situation. Having that many healthy seniors would change the culture about becoming one. Until then, there is nothing wrong with you feeling great for your age, in fact, feeling young for your age. It is even possible that you would feel better than you can remember feeling for years if you allow yourself to take advantage of all the activities around you.

No Brain Drain for Seniors who Make Exercise a Habit

How many times do you hear yourself or other seniors say, "Sorry, I'm just having another senior moment?" Sometimes we even forget whether we said something out loud or just thought it. Other times, we are accused of revising history because we can't remember exactly how an event happened or who was there when it occurred. The aging brain also hinders how quickly we can solve problems or how alert we feel. Some seniors feel like losing memory and the sharpness of their mental faculties is just part of growing old.

In many cases, however, losing the performance of our human computer does not have to be so dramatic. Many seniors are making exercise more of a habit so their sharp and educated minds don't suffer. Studies across the country are showing that seniors who exercise their bodies have the least trouble exercising their minds. It is inevitable that we lose some of our sharpness as we age; however, it is possible to lower how dramatically we feel the effect of aging with just a little extra attention to the body.

If you are thinking that five nights a week at the gym is necessary to maintain your brain's functioning, then luckily you are misinformed. Being a bit more active in general, helps seniors stay focused and recall memories better. Many seniors who incorporate just a few more hours in the garden, or who take a morning stroll three times a week, are relishing their not only increased energy, but their ability to recall memories and stay focused as well.

All the brain is asking for is an increase in oxygen and blood flow a little more often than we may want. Improved circulation allows the body to process more toxins, gets more nutrients to the brain, and encourages the heart to help out in the process. Giving our brain what it needs can help eliminate many of those "senior moments."

Once the brain knows that it will get more out of you, it will give back more as well. There is very much to be said for exercising the brain through reading and other forms of education, but remember that the brain needs the strength which only physical exercise can provide. Increase the number of walks you take, start swimming or going to the gym, play tennis or another team or two-person sport with a friend, or get involved with square, line or ballroom dancing groups.

Walking comes highly recommended since it is cost efficient (besides good shoes and an appropriate jacket for rain or cold) and can be done by stepping out of the house. Weight training, yoga and Pilates are also great ways to get blood flowing to the brain and they let you slowly build up the amount of energy you use. If you can order exercise videos for rainy days, make sure you pick one that is on your level, or is designated for seniors. Pick out something that you know you want to try. If you don't like dancing or aerobics, try a yoga for seniors video for example. Focusing on a video gives your brain something to dig into. The point is to incorporate more activity into your life so your brain can stay healthy.

If you talk to seniors who frequent a gym or who go to dance classes with friends, they will emit a vibrancy that a non-exercising senior will not. They feel better and their brain is happier. They are usually better at recalling information and have an overall appearance which says that they are alert and aware of their surroundings.

The brain and body tire and weaken almost at the same rate without exercise. Exercise requires that the brain helps us coordinate our limbs to perform the activity. These calculations of the human brain, when done often, keep the brain in fit shape. The physical elements of the exercise return oxygen and blood to the brain which help it perform better each time. If the brain seems drained, it is probably because the body has not been challenged and used enough. Give increasing your activity and exercise a chance and see if your brain begins to amaze you once again.

Sassy and Sexy in your Sixties – Fitness that Keeps You Motivated

There is a large amount of evidence that exercise can lead to longer, healthier lives. It can prevent and even help manage some diseases. A good exercise program can help with management of cholesterol, lower blood pressure, burn unnecessary fat, assist with blood sugar levels, promote bone density, keep the immune system in check, and improve mood by preventing depression. One of the biggest problems with exercise, though, is staying motivated.

To assist with motivation, one thing you can do is exercise at work. Because sitting for long periods of time can cause body strain, taking tiny five minute exercise breaks during your workday can help keep you motivated and energized. These little breaks will help keep you going all day, which might make you a bit more productive. One thing you can do is stretch. Get out of your chair and try to touch your toes. Close the door to your office for a few minutes and do some calf stretches against the wall. Another mini-break exercise you can do is a little yoga. There are a number of informational sources devoted to yoga poses you can do at your desk. It will not only relax, you, it might help you refocus on your task as well.

You might also try a little strength training. Try lifting a full soda can for a few minutes. It's not much, but it will keep the blood flowing to your muscles. You could also keep some small hand or ankle weights in your desk and achieve the desired effect. It might also help to take a quick walk, or use the stairs instead of the elevator. This should elevate your pulse and you're breathing a little, which might help with some endurance exercise sessions in the future.

Another way to increase your fitness motivation is dancing your way to good health. Dancing is an amazing activity. It can transport you to an entirely different era or planet for that matter. While your mind relaxes in the beauty of dance, your body gets an amazing workout that you are actually enjoying. In addition to the physical workout you get, your brain gets some exercise by remembering the dance steps. Building those brain pathways can help with the prevention of memory loss. Dancing can help build muscles without joint pain. It can also tone the body and assist with balance issues. Moreover, it is a great activity for seniors because you have the ability to change your level of participation at any point in time.

If you're getting tired, sit the next dance out. You could also try simply slowing your dance steps. If you've never danced before, contact your local community college or dance school to see if they offer classes in a dance you're interested in. Forms of dance you might want to look into include square dancing, swing dancing, line dancing, folk dancing, ballroom dancing, belly dancing, salsa dancing, flamenco dancing, jazz dancing, tap dancing, modern dancing, and clogging. It is most important, though, that you choose a level of dance that you can enjoy.

One way to stay motivated during fitness is to design a fitness plan that is right for you. There are four main areas of fitness that seniors should focus on: endurance, strength, flexibility, and balance. It is best to design a plan that includes all four of these elements. For example, you may choose to engage in an endurance activity like dancing three days a week. Dancing will help with your balance and flexibility as well. To balance it out, you may decide to engage in some strength training activity like martial arts two days a week. Whatever plan you choose for yourself, there are a few keys to keeping yourself motivated with any plan. First, start slowly. If you shoot out of the gate too quickly with a new fitness routine, it can lead to soreness and injury.

Second, be sure that you enjoy whatever fitness activities you have chosen. Boredom leads to abandonment of exercise. Be sure your new exercise plan fits into your daily routine. If you don't have time to exercise, chances are good that you won't find time. You might also try finding an exercise buddy. Friends tend to motivate each other. Also, track your progress and reward yourself for success. Fitness is never easy, but staying motivated is one of the keys to good health.

The Senior New Year's Resolution – Get Moving for Life!

There was a time when people stated that the only two sure things in life were death and taxes. But all of the recent research points to one additional certainty, the slogan, *"Get Fit, For Life."*

The growing opinion of all researchers is that exercise, even in its most modest forms, is simply the best prescription for both physical and mental health. If you want to continue your quality of life as you age, then exercise is found to be the best remedy. That notion is reflected across all age groups, whether you are female or male, and is also independent of cultural differences.

The failure to be active is putting you at a major risk for coronary artery disease. In fact, inactivity creates a major risk for coronary issues such as smoking, unhealthy cholesterol, and high blood pressure. Regular exercise can improve the health of your heart and actually reverse some health risk factors such as that of smoking. Like all body muscles, the heart is also a muscle and will become stronger as a result of exercise. Cardiovascular workouts can strengthen the heart which in turn helps it pump more blood with every beat and sustains its maximum level with less strain. That translates to a slower heart rate while resting because less effort is needed to pump blood throughout the body.

People who exercise vigorously and often will reduce the risk of heart disease the greatest, but studies also show that any exercise can be beneficial. Studies have found that moderate exercise is also beneficial for those people with existing heart disease.

Another example of the positive effects of exercise is the impact found on people getting the common cold. A University of South Carolina study analyzed data over the course of a year, studying the behaviors of more than 500 healthy women and men. The study group, with the average age of 48, yielded some noteworthy findings. Though all participants in the research were healthy, not all exercised regularly. The exercise patterns ranged from those who did no exercise to those who spent at least 30 minutes in moderate exercise. The study then compared the physical activity to the intensity and the number of colds the participants had over the course of the year.

The findings were exactly as one would think. Those who got at least a moderate amount of exercise on just a few days a week averaged just one cold. In the study, the less active participants reported more than 4 colds in the year. The greatest benefit came during the prime cold season in the fall when nearly 40 percent of all colds were reported. The more active participants showed a reduction of 32 percent during the prime cold season.

A second study by David Nieman of Appalachian State University found that those who exercised recovered more quickly when they did come down with a cold. Nieman's study focused on women compared those who walked regularly to those that did not. The more active group who still got colds had symptoms that usually lasted for less than five days, while the women in the less active group had colds that lasted seven days.

Being physically active appears to stimulate immune cells that target many viruses and infections. Though exercise appears to stimulate such cells, that stimulation appears to last only a few hours. However, regular exercise appears to lower the overall risk of being susceptible to the flu, colds, and other viruses.

When it comes to weight and weight gain, the benefits of exercise have always been known. But to be frank, moderately intense exercise of 30 minutes may not in and of itself be enough to prevent weight gain. Current recommendations suggest that 45 to 60 minutes per day is more appropriate if you want to prevent weight gain. In addition, exercise will not simply melt excess pounds away magically. To lose significant weight, both increased exercise and reduced calorie intake is required. What many people are unaware of is that the person exercises without dieting may not lose any actual weight because as we exercise we replace fat with more dense and heavier muscle mass.

But the psychological effects of exercise on dieting patterns as well as weight control also appear to be very significant. Studies indicate that people who exercise regularly are more apt to stay on a diet plan once a plan has been implemented. Some studies have reported that even modest exercise patterns lead to mild appetite suppression. Why that is so is still unclear but exercise appears to improve a person's psychological well being and give the person more will power to resist breaking from the diet, exercise replaces the sedentary habits like watching television that is often accompanied by the urge to snack.

Most importantly, exercise without dieting still adds extraordinary health benefits. One study reported that people who are overweight but fit have half the death rate of overweight and unfit people. Other studies have suggested that people who have exercised regularly for many years develop efficient body mechanisms that help burn fat and thereby contribute to a person's staying leaner as they age.

Yet another study reported a 58% lower risk for Type 2 diabetes in adults who exercise for as little as 2.5 hours a week, even if the exercise was of a moderate level. That level of exercise reduces the risk in overweight people, even if those people remain overweight. Regular exercise improves insulin sensitivity. People with diabetes are at high risk for heart disease, so the protective effects of aerobic exercise on the heart are very important for people with Type 2 diabetes. Initial indications are that strength training to increase muscle mass and reduce patient fat is also helpful for people with diabetes.

And perhaps the most interesting positive report to date on the healthy effects of exercise is a British Journal of Sports Medicine that suggests that aerobic exercise can help to lift depression. Though the authors of this study used a very small sample of just twelve people, the pilot also suggested that regular exercise works faster than antidepressant drugs in treating depression.

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