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The Medical Aspects of Staying Fit as You Age

Check-up or Check-out – Get a Doctor's Advice

Before Starting a New Fitness Program

When it comes to medical care, the ability to talk to your doctor openly is critical to obtaining the best overall care. That notion is magnified when it comes to the idea of beginning a regular fitness routine, especially if you have been primarily without any form of rigorous physical activity in recent months or years. How well you and your doctor communicate with one another will determine whether or not your relationship can become a healthy partnership. Taking an active role in your own health care makes your wellness a collaborative affair.

The first key element is to talk to your doctor about what kind of exercise is most appropriate for you. The type of exercise that your doctor will recommend will depend on whether you have any current health problems. In having the discussion with your doctor, it is very important that you too share with him/her some of your prior health issues as they may not all be foremost in your doctor's mind or easily found in past charts.

At a minimum, you should have your pulse and blood pressure checked. If possible, it would be great to be able to take a basic stress or fitness test to help determine your current physical status. In addition, you should make a basic exercise plan and review it with your doctor for potential feedback. Ultimately, seek your doctor's approval for the program you have in mind.

As you begin to consider a plan, think as much about the duration and frequency as you do about the activity itself. One can do the same activity for 10 minutes or 20 minutes or do two different sessions of 10 minutes each. If you are considering walking as your exercise, the options are endless. You can walk some every day, you can walk longer every other day, or you can walk fast one day and more slowly another. You can also walk on flat ground or on slopes, hills that are gentle rises or steeper inclines. Discussing with your doctor the desire to be a walking regiment can mean drastically different things depending on the approach used.

If the development process is left to the doctor to begin an exercise routine, doctors will likely recommend at least one type of aerobic exercise. Aerobic exercise forces you to breathe deeper and makes your heart work harder. Simple examples of aerobic exercise include walking, jogging, and bicycling. Your doctor will also note the importance of starting off slowly, walking at a leisurely pace before doing any power walking and then walking at a brisk pace before jogging. If bicycling is the suggested activity, the advice will focus on beginning on level ground and again pedaling at a modest pace before increasing one's effort.

If you have particular physical problems then your doctor will likely focus on one type of activity over another. For example, a person with problems with their feet or legs will seek suggestions that won't put stress on their feet. People with foot or leg problems will be steered towards exercises like swimming, bicycling, or even rowing, all activities that put little or no stress on a person's feet or legs.

No matter what kind of exercise you will be involved in, warming up is critical. As one ages, the need to spend 5 to 10 minutes in a very low impact activity is even more important. In addition, the need to cool down after exercising is also extremely important. Doing basic stretches before and after exercising will prevent muscle stiffness and reduce the likelihood of injuries.

Though your doctor may not suggest it, a key element for developing a fitness routine is the importance of finding an exercise buddy. Because exercising requires huge self-discipline, it is difficult to make and stick to a regular routine by yourself. Many people find that it is much easier to build a consistent exercise routine or pattern by finding some one else to exercise with. An exercise buddy can be a neighbor or friend, anyone willing to commit to working out in the same pattern that you are doing so. Some people join an exercise class for that reason alone. The opportunity to interact with others is critical to help maintain motivation. However, it is essential to find a buddy or a class that is appropriate for the type of workout you are capable of doing. Being pushed into something that is too strenuous is absolutely the wrong approach to developing a consistent routine.

And finally, make it a point to walk whenever you can, whenever you need to go any place in your neighborhood. Walking is a great form of low impact exercise, but if one simply does enough walking research indicates that it can be just as beneficial as more vigorous forms of exercise. The key is both the duration and the regularity. Most importantly, you are getting much needed exercise without actually taking the time from your day to exercise.

Senior Goals – Realistic Expectations for Physical Activity

Set realistic expectations for your work outs. After you have had your check-up and talk with your doctor and gained clearance for an exercise routine, there are some basic rules that will help you ensure that you have set realistic expectations. First and foremost, if something hurts, stop immediately. If the pain persists when you begin to exercise again, take a break.

If you are under the weather, take it easy. You may need to skip your routine entirely if you are feeling very ill, but certainly thinking about at least modifying your routine when you are not feeling well. If you have experienced some unusual pain or if you have been ill, when you start your routine up again, start slowly likely you did when you began the routine. If you feel chest pain or pressure, breathing trouble or excessive shortness of breath persistent pain in a muscle or joint, nausea and unusual balance difficulties you should make an appointment to meet with your doctor once again.

The best way to get started on a routine is to begin with 10 minutes a couple times a day. Take it slow, moving at a consistent pace. Be sure to wear comfortable, non-restrictive clothing that keeps your body temperature comfortable as well. Dressing in layers is a key element to ensure that you can adjust as your body temperature rises. Early on, don't overexert yourself in any manner and be sure to drink plenty of water before, during and after your activity.

Always ease your body into exercise. Stretching or walking for at least 5 minutes is a great way to get both looser and warmed up. As you begin to feel stronger, gradually increase both the time and intensity of your activity. If walking, walk faster or uphill and walk for longer periods

of time. If bicycling, do likewise. If you can get active with friends you stand a good chance of keeping it interesting. Finally, work for consistency. If you do a small amount every day, it will become a part of a routine that you will automatically include. Too many people focus on doing a lot occasionally. That tends to make it difficult to keep up your routine - with research pointing to regularity and consistency, keeping up your routine is the most important aspect of your program.

Remember, your schedule can include a variety of activity. It is also possible to mix traditional forms of exercise with the non-traditional to ensure that your routine is neither grueling nor boring. Non-traditional forms can include gardening, walking your dog, and even spending an evening going dancing. Most importantly, if you are having fun, your routine will be better for you overall, physically, mentally and emotionally. Most importantly it will be much easier for you to maintain.

A tip that helps those who start an exercise schedule to maintain that schedule is to keep an Activity Log. Writing down what types of activity you do everyday is a great way help you realize just how much you have accomplished or haven't accomplished on any given day. In addition, as the days go on, your log will make it easier for you to keep up your new pace especially when you are to look back to see the progress you have made.

Physical activity yields a multitude of physical, mental and psychological benefits. Regular physical activity reduces a person's risk of heart disease and if the person experiences hypertension, exercise will also lower the blood pressure of the exerciser. Physical exercise protects against loss in bone mass, reducing the risk of osteoporosis and reduces the risk of falling and breaking a bone in the fall.

New research shows that regular exercise may help prevent Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Exercise also increases your body metabolism helping shed useless weight - increased muscle mass helps a person burn more calories as muscle burns more calories than fat. A healthy, strong body is also the surest way to fight off infection and sickness, as well as allow people who become sick to recover from their illness far quickly.

There is no doubt that a physically active lifestyle is one of the most important contributions to healthy aging. The key is to start and to start now. In fact, many people will state that the most difficult part of any new endeavor is getting started. So the key is to simply tell yourself that you can do it and the time to do it is now. Be sure to pace yourself and move slowly at the outset, making exercise a regular part of your day. Regardless of the amount of time and the intensity of the work out, the key is to start by doing something, anything. If you can make it a habit, then it will become easier for you to create a routine that you can consistently commit to and ultimately build upon if you seek to increase your fitness.

Sedentary Seniors Start Slow in Your New Fitness Program

Once many people reach the age of 50, they begin to believe that they are too old or frail to exercise. But staying active as we age directly leads to the living of a fuller life. Most importantly, recent studies indicate that it is never too late to begin taking care of you. In

taking your first step towards an exercise routine, remember that it is never too late and you are never too old to begin. But starting slow with your fitness program means that even before embarking on any training program, it is worthwhile to first have a complete medical check up. Such an appointment is especially important if you have been sedentary for a period of time, or have current injuries and/or hereditary medical conditions.

Starting slow also means beginning with moderate levels of exercise of short duration. A meandering, ten minute walk is a simple form of such exercise. Depending on your fitness level, that walk may be lengthened to 15 minutes, or you can walk in one direction for 10 minutes, stop to rest, and then return to your original starting point. If you find that you feel you are capable of more, try to resist doing too much that first time so that you do not become so sore or tired that the next day leaves you feeling you cannot duplicate the walk. Taking time between such exercise also allows you to see how your body feels after time has passed. You can always take another short walk later in the day if you still feel up to the task.

Thirty minutes of modest exercise should however become the goal. But one needn't start there nor does the thirty minutes all have to come at one time. If you have been inactive for a lengthy period of time, it may take several weeks before you feel comfortable with a thirty minute walk at one time. Because as we age, there are many bodily changes associated with that process. Aging leads to a decrease in muscle strength, respiratory capacity, metabolic rate, muscle flexibility and physical reaction times.

Aging also brings on a higher risk of osteoporosis, especially for menopausal women. Our inability to move our legs quickly due to shortened connective tissues leads to a reduced length of stride, as well as a decrease in stability and mobility. In addition, our sense of pain sensitivity often becomes impaired, sometimes making us unaware when we exert too much pressure on a vulnerable joint.

Regular exercise is deemed to prevent as much as 50 % of these possible functional declines. The benefits from physical activity come in many forms, both physical and psychological. Regular physical activity slows the ageing process and increases both your stamina and energy.

Consistent exercise increases the efficiency of your heart and lungs and produces improvements in muscle tone, endurance and strength. Regular activity prevents joints, tendons, and ligaments stiffening up leading to greater range of movement. Regular workouts decrease blood pressure, both systolic and diastolic, and also decrease the resting heart rate. Among the psychological benefits of exercise are improved self-image, and confidence, along with decreased stress and tension levels.

In considering your activities, three categories to examine are flexibility, aerobic training and weight training. As you begin your exercise routine, spend a great deal of time on increasing your flexibility right from the outset. In fact, for the very sedentary, a few weeks of such training should precede any real aerobic or weight training. Flexibility is extremely important as it keeps our muscles from becoming short and tight, two factors that can lead to injury. Working to improve your range of movement will make it much easier for you to perform simple everyday tasks.

As you begin your exercise routine, always do some type of warm-up and stretching activity? Beginning with some simple mobility exercises to help lubricate your joints be sure to pay attention to every area of your body, starting with your feet and working your way to shoulders and neck area. Be sure to not force any movements and stop if you begin to feel any pain.

After working on basic flexibility begin with some type of aerobic activity. The simplest is to take walks at a comfortable pace. Be sure to do your work outs in short bouts at first, beginning slowly and for short blocks of time. The critical component is to remind yourself that you are about to begin an exercise routine that will continue for the rest of your life.

Another good form of aerobic activity is aqua aerobics, an activity that is highly suitable for the newly motivated and much easier for people who are overweight. The buoyancy of the water will help support your body weight all the while allowing a full range of both movement and exercises to be performed. The water itself can be used as resistance to help even do some modest strength training.

As you begin your aerobic workouts, strive for activity 3 –5 times per week, working out for a period of 20 – 60 minutes. However, always make sure that you are staying within your physical limits. Ultimately you should never be out of breath, but both your heart and breathing rates should increase. The simplest way to determine if your pace level is appropriate is to see if you can converse normally - if you have trouble speaking you are simply going too fast.

Limited Mobility Does Not Mean no Physical Activity – Disabled Seniors Get Moving

The Top 9 Tips before Starting an Exercise Program

Fitness experts have this advice for disabled senior citizens who think that exercise is out for them – just get moving. The benefits of regular physical activity have been proven time and again in study after study. Being active on a regular basis cuts the risk of nearly every single age-related disease, improves your circulation, brightens your outlook on life and helps you feel and look younger.

For seniors diagnosed with particular disabilities, though, the benefits of regular exercise can be even more important. Those with arthritis and other joint-related diseases, for instance, were once told to take it easy and don't move those joints too much. Doctors now realize that immobilizing those painful joints just leads to more stiffness and joint pain. Instead, they now recommend moderate, regular exercise to increase mobility, range of motion and flexibility and decrease pain.

For diabetics, regular physical activity can reduce the effects of diabetic neuropathy by keeping blood circulating and increasing the flow of nutrients to the extremities. In fact, there's no one who doesn't benefit from regular, moderate to strenuous physical activity, according to experts.

If it's been a while since you've been mobile, the experts have some tips on getting active again with safety and fun in mind.

Find out what activities and exercises are safe for you. Talk to your doctor or a physical therapist about exercise routines that take your limited mobility into account.

Exercise with a friend. Besides having a backup buddy along, you'll find it's more fun and easier to stick to a commitment to exercise when you make plans to do things with a friend.

Think outside the box when you think of 'exercise'. Anything that gets you moving and keeps you moving for 10 to 30 minutes is a good thing. Stretching, swimming, walking, dancing – they all count as exercise.

Thirty minutes is your goal, but if that's too much at once shoot for two fifteen minute periods, or three ten minute ones. Take the time to stretch and relax muscles before trying anything strenuous so that you don't injure yourself.

Take it slow at first and build up gradually. Start with 25% of what you think you can do and increase time and/or repetitions no more than 10% a week.

Mary Ann Wilson, host of the nationally syndicated PBS program "Sit and Be Fit" suggests starting with deep breathing and moving to stretches that use a towel to help pace and measure yourself. To strengthen upper back, for example, she suggests the following stretch:

Sitting in a chair, hold arms out at hip level, holding a towel taut between your hands. Keeping the towel taut, turn as far to the right as you can. Return to center. Turn to the left in the same manner. Return to the center. Still holding the towel taut, bend your elbows and bring towel to your chest. Now straighten arms directly in front of you at shoulder level and repeat stretches to the left and right.

Posture is important. One of the key benefits of exercising is improvement to your posture – and practicing good posture is an exercise in itself. Work on tightening abdominal muscles and keeping shoulders and hips in line to strengthen your spine and back muscles.

Check with your health insurance provider and Medicare about the possibility of specialized exercise equipment. More and more HMOs and insurance providers are recognizing the importance of exercise in staying healthy and in preventing some of the most common complications of chronic disability. Exercise balls, bounce chairs and other specialized training equipment may help a disabled senior become active and fit again.

Join an exercise group or class. Social activity is nearly as good for you as the exercise you'll get. Check with your local senior center or rehabilitation center for classes that might be available to interest you.

Don't let conditions that limit your mobility rule your life. Taking the initiative to get active and stay active will pay off in increased mobility, better circulation and a healthier outlook on life – just what you need to help you feel fit and young.

Heart Healthy Workouts for Retirees

3 Fun Ways to Exercise

Walk 10,000 steps a day. If you haven't heard the 10,000 steps mantra by now, you haven't been paying attention. The 10,000 steps program is part of a concentrated effort to encourage Americans to get active and stay fit. According to many recent studies, engaging in moderate exercise three to five times a week can help reduce the risk of heart disease, hypertension, stroke, diabetes and arthritis. Coupled with a balanced diet, exercise is the number one way to get healthy and stay healthy.

This message is especially important for those over the age of fifty-five, says the American Heart Association. Because regular exercise helps maintain weight and tone all the body's systems, it's one of the keys to avoiding the most common diseases and disorders affecting older Americans. Many seniors, though, mistakenly fear that vigorous exercise will do more harm than good. Not so, according to the experts.

Aerobic exercises get the circulation moving and the heart pumping. That helps tone the heart muscle, lower blood pressure; reduce your risk of heart attack, control blood sugar and increase alertness and overall well-being. According to the National Institutes of Health, the best exercises are those that increase the heart rate and maintain elevated heart rates for at least ten minutes – aerobic exercises. That gives your heart time to get pumping and spark your metabolism so that it keeps working that extra bit harder for as much as an hour after you finish exercising. The general recommendation for a workout is ten minutes of warm-up and stretching, ten minutes of moderately vigorous exercise and ten minutes to cool down and stretch.

If the term 'aerobic exercise' has you shaking your head at the thought of bouncing around the gym in skin-tight shiny spandex, you can relax. Aerobic exercise is ANY activity that can get your heart to work out along with your other muscles. Among the exercise that the American Physical Therapy Association recommends for seniors are golf, gardening, walking, swimming and jogging. There's almost no physical activity that you can't turn into a heart healthy aerobic workout. Choose your sport and try one of these workouts from the American Physical Therapy Association.

Golf

If you haven't played golf in a while – or if you're just starting and haven't been active – start exercising a few weeks before you go into full swing. Exercise about the same time of day that you'll be golfing so that you've got similar conditions. Take a twenty minute walk three or four times a week. Spend some time practicing your swing, starting with a shorter, lighter club and gradually working your way up.

Before you head out onto the green, take ten minutes to stretch. The APTA recommends calf and hamstring stretches and upper body twists to loosen up the muscles you'll be using the most.

Gardening

Gardening can give your heart a surprisingly energetic workout. There's digging and bending and lifting and carrying – and that's before you even get out of the shed with all your gardening equipment. To turn a gardening session into a heart healthy workout, the APTA suggests that you start with a series of stretches to help loosen up the muscles. Once you're warmed up, do some 'aerobic gardening' – activities that use your whole body – for 15-20 minutes. Raking and hoeing are two good choices for aerobic gardening, but any activity that gets your heart and lungs working at full capacity works just fine too. After your workout, cool down with some more sedentary gardening – trimming flower heads or picking vegetables.

Water Aerobics

Water fitness classes are among the best aerobics exercises you can do, especially if you suffer from joint stiffness or arthritic pain. Because you're in the water, there's no impact shock, making water exercises the ideal form of low-impact aerobic exercise. Water is kind to your joints and bones – but the weight of the water adds an extra layer of resistance to your movements. You can get a full workout that includes jumping jacks and all the benefits of cross-country skiing in deep water aerobics – with less than 10% of the stress on your joints. Do take it easy, though, warn many fitness experts. Because exercising in water is so easy, it's also easy to overdo and strain muscles.

Walk this Way - Every Senior Step Counts

Walking has easily become the most popular form of exercise. It is also the only form of exercise for which the rate of participation does not decline as one ages. In fact, in a recent national survey, the highest percentage of regular walkers as a group was that of men 65 years of age and older. Because walking is the lowest-impact form of exercise we can perform, it is now considered the slowest as well as surest method for obtaining physical fitness.

Because walking was once considered too easy to be thought of as actual exercise, many did not see the action as having the additional impact of improving physical fitness. However a study now clearly shows that walking, especially if done briskly and regularly, is an excellent form of exercise. Consider some of the following data regarding walking as an activity for the purposes of creating physical fitness.

First walking burns approximately the same amount of calories per mile as does running. Though seen at first as impossible, people have begun to understand that the key is that it simply takes longer to cover the mile while walking than it does while jogging. Walking, however, is of course much less stressful on the body, particularly in regards to the pummeling effects on a person's feet, ankles, and knees when involved in long distance jogging. Recent research indicates that a brisk walking pace of 4 miles per hour, the equivalent of one mile every 15 minutes will burn the same number of calories as jogging at a pace that covers the same distance in 8 1/2 minutes.

Although increasing walking speed will not burn significantly more calories per mile, a vigorous walking pace will actually produce more dramatic conditioning effects on a person. The key point here is the person's initial fitness level. A person in poor shape will receive significant benefit from a slow speed of walking. However, someone in better shape will either need to walk faster or farther to improve their current conditioning level. A positive impact of increased pace or longer walking distances is the residual benefit of that exercise. Because such a work out pace increases a person's metabolism rate, their rate will remain elevated after the work out is complete resulting in the burning of additional calories.

Among the most attractive aspects of walking is that almost everyone can do it. Nobody needs to take lessons to learn how to walk. In addition, all you need to do to become a more serious walker is walk faster, increase your distance and walk more often. Walking can be done almost anywhere and the variety of options available is one of the things that make walking such a practical activity. You can consider the mall, the neighborhood or easy hiking trails, with the weather dictating a choice on a given day. Most importantly, walking doesn't cost anything - there are no club fees, no equipment to buy, and no lessons to be taken. Your only required equipment is a comfortable pair of shoes and clothing to match, items that of course can be worn at other times.

Because of its low impact nature, walking is now considered more effective than running and other more highly-touted activities when it comes to weight loss. The reason is because walking is virtually devoid of injury potential and because it has the lowest dropout rate of any form of exercise.

If you need some statistics to help you understand why walking is good for you, try the following. Just thirty minutes of walking a day reduces Cardiovascular Heart Disease by 30 to 50%. In addition, the more active you are now, the less likely you are to die in the next 11 years. So if you want the surest form of health improvement with the least likely form of injury or setback potential, then consider walking as your form of exercise.

Since walking for exercise can be done to get you from one location to another, can be done alone or with a partner for the purposes of socialization and can be done at any pace for any distance, it's easily the most attractive form of exercise for everyone. The person just starting a new exercise routine as well as the veteran participant that has already developed a fundamental level of fitness will enjoy walking as a form of exercise.

Joints for Health – Staying Flexible Through Physical Fitness

Arthritis is a debilitating condition for many people. Lots of new people are diagnosed with this terrible condition each year. Arthritis is defined as the inflammation of a joint, but it can certainly seem more painful than that. It can cause searing pain that leaves the body feeling weak for days. As people age, arthritis tends to develop from the extended every day uses of the body.

Other things though can help the development of arthritis. Being overweight, having bad posture, and serious injuries can all speed the development of this condition. Arthritis can cause

the cartilage to wear out and thin. The rubbing of the bones causes irritation and inflammation. While this pain can sometimes be relieved through rest, the patient can also sometimes experience pain that seems never ending.

Exercise, though, can assist with arthritis by strengthening the muscles near the joint which helps reduce joint stress. While exercise is necessary for everyone, it is essential for those with arthritis. While it is probably not a good idea to engage in the most rigorous forms of exercise with arthritis, physical activity is not out of the question. For those without arthritis, exercise can help prevent this horrible disease.

There are several exercises that can help maintain joint health. Bicycling tends to be very helpful to most joints, and it can be done by people of all ages. Stretching is another exercise related activity that can help with joints. Stretching every day can add flexibility. Stair climbing can strengthen the lower body joints. One of the best things about stair climbing is the fact that stairs are everywhere and free to climb. Swimming is a great way to warm up all of your joints. Water aerobics is even better. This is one of the best possible exercises for people who are already experiencing joint pain, as the water cushions the movement and causes no pain.

Exercise is not the only way to strengthen joints. There are several other everyday things you can do to help your joints. You can start by ensuring you are at your ideal body weight. Obesity or even being a few pounds overweight causes undue wear and tear on your joints. Stress in the joints only leads to pain in future years. You should also watch your posture. Appropriate body posture can protect the joints from unnecessary stress.

When you must lift or carry something heavy, use your legs. This can help take the stress away from your smallest joints and muscles. Be sure to build in rest periods. Too much activity at any one time is not good for your delicate joints and muscles. Pay attention to what your body has to say. If you feel tired, rest. If you are in pain, stop what you are doing. Ignoring your body can only lead to overuse and injury.

Staying in one place for long periods of time causes your muscles to shorten and stiffen. Move around as often as possible. Start slowly and build gradually. Your body needs time to acclimate to new activities. If you plan to engage in a dangerous activity, wear safety equipment. Knee pads while you are roller-blading can help reduce damage in a fall. If a job is too big for you, be sure to ask for help. Carrying too much weight or reaching too high causes further stress to your joints.

There are also several health supplements that promise to assist with joint health. While not all are the miracles they claim to be, few cause any side effects. Glucosamine and chondroitin are used to build cartilage. Taking it as a supplement is supposed to help your joints heal. It, however, can take at least 2 – 4 months before it can take effect. Side effects, though, can include increased insulin levels, so diabetics should avoid it altogether. Omega 3 fatty acids reduce joint problems. They can be found in fish and flax seed oil. However, it can interact with medications, so consult your doctor first. SAM, which is S-adenosyl-methionine, can be used to build other coenzymes like dopamine or glucosamine. It both rebuilds and protects joints, but it changes the properties of any psychoactive medication you may be on, including antidepressants. As always, check with your doctor before you take anything he hasn't prescribed.

Old Arthur Is Kicking In? Try Water Exercising

We all know that exercise is an important part of remaining healthy. However, when our joints refuse to play along, exercise is transformed from a fun and invigorating enterprise into a test of how much pain we can endure. When we're suffering from arthritis, we tend to keep our joints as still as possible. This can lead to a weakening of the muscles and tendons and a stiffening of joints.

It's interesting that the most basic aid in the struggle against arthritis doesn't come from a pharmaceutical company, or from modern science. It has been with us for thousands of years and has been recommended by the medical community throughout the ages. Since the first hot springs were discovered and the secret of fire became known, humans have used the magic of warm water baths to combat aching joints.

Now, with spas, health clubs, backyard hot tubs and Jacuzzis, almost everyone has access to a pool of hot water in which to relax. The warmth provided by hot water allows muscles to relax and increases the circulation of blood to the joints. Not only does this bring some immediate relief of arthritis symptoms, but it also provides us with a great environment in which we can exercise.

Exercise in a hot tub? Absolutely! Besides reducing the pain in our joints, exercising in water allows for body weight to be supported. This makes exercising in water much safer and, therefore, more relaxing. In addition, the resistance that water provides as we move within it helps strengthen our muscles.

Before we begin water exercise, we should consult a doctor, of course. For most of us, water exercise is perfectly safe, but there are exceptions. These include those of us who have experienced serious joint damage or replacement surgery—your doctor will know what's right for you. We should also be aware of some general guidelines. Water between 83 and 88 degrees (Fahrenheit) is considered best for exercise. Water around 100 degrees can be very relaxing, but may also lead to overheating.

After you've received the advice of a doctor, it's time to begin!

The Arthritis Foundation Aquatics Program is a warm water exercise program designed by the Arthritis Foundation. Classes are offered at local pools nationwide—contact your local Arthritis Foundation office for information. The classes are lead by a trained instructor, usually last between 45 minutes to an hour and are scheduled 2 to 3 times a week.

If you can't locate a program close to home, a number of at-home spas and hot tubs are available for purchase. In fact, if advised to engage in water exercise by a doctor, the purchase of the hot tub or spa may be a tax-deductible medical expense. Ask your tax professional before installing a spa at home.

Whether at a local pool, or at home, you should allow your body to warm up in the water before beginning any exercise. This will allow for your muscles to relax and for your circulation to increase. The body part being exercised should be submerged in the warm water and all movements should be performed slowly and gently. While performing an exercise, attempt to

follow through the full range of motion if possible, but stop the movement if you experience sudden or increased pain.

A number of safe and effective exercise programs exist online along with illustrations. Basically, any joint movement, combined with the resistance of the water, serves both to keep the joint limber and to strengthen the muscles surrounding the joint. While seated in the warm water, simple exercises include flexing wrists and ankles forward and backward as well as side to side. You can extend your legs from a seated position, straightening them out in front of you. A good shoulder exercise consists of holding your arms straight out in front of you and slowly lifting them up until they are pointing towards the sky. Each motion should be carried out between 3 and 8 times. If, an hour or two after leaving the pool, you experience soreness in the muscles or joints, you may have overdone it a little, and should cut back next time.

These exercises and others can be found in a free brochure "Water Exercise: Pools, Spas and Arthritis" from the Arthritis Foundation. Water exercise provides an excellent way to stay fit and active despite arthritis. With a doctor's guidance, a water exercise program is a fun and effective way to combat arthritis and keep joints and muscles healthy.

Bone of Contention – Strength Training for Candidates of Osteoporosis

Doctors Give the Top 9 Opinions

What's one of the best ways to prevent osteoporosis? According to many experts in the field of bone health, it's exercise. More specifically, strength training offers many benefits for men and women at risk of bone loss from osteoporosis.

Strength training, also called resistance training, uses resistance from free weights, resistance bands, and water exercise or weight machines to help build strength in muscles. It also can help work on the bones to prevent the loss of minerals that weaken them. In fact, according to sports doctors, strength training can increase your bone strength, reduce your risk of osteoporosis, improve the strength of your connective tissues, which increases joint stability and increase the functional strength of your muscles. In addition, strength training improves balance and reduces your risk of falling by approximately 25%.

If you already have osteoporosis, say doctors, strength training can still benefit you in many ways, but you should work with your doctor or an experienced physical therapist to design a workout that will benefit your bones without increasing the risk of stress or compression fractures. In particular, they suggest that you avoid sharp, twisting movements or frequent bending forward from the waist. Both of those movements, say doctors, will put undue strain on the weight bearing muscles of the spine.

If your main intent is to prevent osteoporosis, you should work with heavier weights and more resistance. How much can strength training help? A study conducted at the University of Arizona and published in *Medicine and Science in Sports & Exercise* gives some answers to that. In that study, scientists recruited 140 post menopausal women with a history of sedentary lifestyle for a year-long regimen of three time's weekly workouts. The women performed eight

exercises specifically chosen to work on particular muscle groups. To track the effects of exercise on bone density, scientists took bone scans both before and after the study. The results showed that the chosen exercises had a measurable effect on the bones of the hips, site of the most common fractures in post menopausal women. They also found that the greater the amount of total weight lifted over the course of the year, the greater the benefits to the bones.

If you're just starting a resistance and strength training program, doctors and physical therapists offer the following advice:

Consult your doctor and follow a program designed by a physical therapist which takes your strengths and needs into account.

Work out at a gym or health club under the supervision of professionals who can help monitor and adjust your workout program.

Start slow and build gradually. Strength and resistance training is a slow process.

Never increase weights in resistance training more than 10% at a time. Increasing more than that risks injury.

Lift and lower weights slowly. Avoid 'jerking' them up to avoid injury.

Perform your resistance workout every third day.

Avoid exercise that puts a lot of strain on your joints and bones, and stay away from the rowing machine. The bending required puts your spine at risk of compression fractures.

Expect stiffness, not pain. If you're in pain through most of the next day, stop training for a day or two. Use ice to reduce swelling and don't start again till you can perform the exercises comfortably.

If any area is particularly tender or stiff immediately after a workout, apply ice to it for 10-15 minutes to reduce inflammation.

You can increase the effectiveness of a strength training program by making a few lifestyle changes at the same time. If you smoke, quit. Not only will you find it easier to exercise, but nicotine can rob your body of its ability to process calcium. Increase your intake of calcium and Vitamin D to help bones grow stronger. On days when you're not working out with weights, take an hour long walk, or engage in another aerobic activity to help keep your heart in shape.

Proper exercise, weight control and a healthy diet all contribute to keeping your bones strong and preventing the loss of bone density due to osteoporosis. Do your bones a favor and give them a good workout a couple of times a week.

Hitting the Bottle, the Water Bottle, That Is! Staying Hydrated During Senior Work-outs

While it is certainly an overused expression, it is truly important to stay hydrated during a workout. During an exercise session, heat is built up in the muscle groups of focus which causes the body temperature to increase. The body tries to cool itself by sweating. The sweat evaporates from the skin, and it is that process that assists in supporting a lower core body temperature. Sometimes, though, this process isn't an adequate way of cooling, due to factors like moisture and humidity. As a result, the bodies continue to sweat, causing further fluid loss.

The only way to replace this fluid loss is to drink more fluid. There are a number of very serious consequences to dehydration. One consequence is a decline in workout effectiveness. The fluid lost through sweat originates in blood plasma. Plasma is the means of transportation for red blood cells. They hold the oxygen is essential for muscle performance.

As dehydration sets in, the blood capacity is lessened, and the ability of your blood to carry oxygen is depressed. Persisting in a workout while dehydrated can cause a dip in blood pressure, dizziness, nausea, or fainting, essentially the symptoms of heat exhaustion. Continuing past this point may cause heat stroke. IF heat stroke occurs, the body temperature rises. During heat stroke, the body no longer sweats. Serious consequences like seizure, coma, and death can be the result of untreated heat stroke because not only does the blood carry oxygen to muscles, it also carries it to the brain and other vital organs. Symptoms of dehydration include thirst, infrequent urination, fatigue, and dry skin.

Seniors are particularly susceptible to dehydration for several reasons. As people age, the skin thins. This makes it more likely to lose fluid, which leads to dehydration. Medications seniors take on a regular basis can also make them more prone to this condition. Aging bodies also don't contain as much fluid as younger ones do, and seniors have a decreased thirst sensation. This makes it more likely they will be prone to dehydration. Kidney efficiency may be compromised which also offers increased risk. Some seniors even limit their fluid intake because of incontinence. Moreover, many seniors are unaware of these risks and don't carefully monitor fluid intake.

Fortunately, there are a number of ways to prevent dehydration. To get enough water during a workout, consume eight ounces of water every fifteen minutes while exercising. While that sounds extreme, it is necessary to keep fluids in the body. If you are unable to drink that amount, it is okay to take in smaller quantities every ten minutes. These recommendations should be followed at all times, not just exercising outdoors in the summer. It is still possible to lose extensive fluids during an indoor workout in the cool air.

Fluid loss of any kind leads to dehydration. It is important not to stall and wait until the thirst hits to start consuming water. Thirst originates in the brain. The hypothalamus examines the amount of salt contained in the blood. As blood volume lessens because of sweat, the salt count goes up, and the body receives the alarm to start drinking, but by the time the body gets that indicator, dehydration has already occurred.

You can tell you are drinking enough water if your urine is not yellow. Clear urine indicates an appropriate level of hydration. It is important to continue to consume water after the workout.

It is also important to remember that drinks containing caffeine only help with dehydration. These drinks cause quick loss of fluid, so it is probably a good idea to consume an additional glass of water for each caffeinated beverage you consume. This is also true of beverages that contain alcohol. It is a good idea to drink water before, during, and after your workout.

Overall, you should consume eight glasses of water per day whether you workout or not. If you workout, it's a good idea to consume at least 22 ounces of water for each hour of exercise you engage in. If you plan to exercise for more than one hour, you should drink a sports drink to hydrate. It is also important to avoid high-protein diets. If a diet gives your body more than 1.8 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight per day, it will increase the frequency of urination and lead to dehydration.

Getting Better at Getting Older – Physical Activities to Keep you in the Game

The older we get, the more ways the body will find to surprise us with its newly found inabilities. It seems like one break down of the body keeps us filled up with excuses for longer and longer periods of time for why we are unable to do one thing or another. There are some limitations set due to these drawbacks that have to be configured into staying physically active. The key is to keep the body active in as many ways as possible, working around any limitations that emerge.

We also should be aware that there are many who overcome their conditions, not always by eliminating the condition, but by working the body much as you can. There are many survivors of cancer, for example, who motivate themselves past significant degrees of fatigue, nausea and depression by working back toward wellness in anyway they can. Getting older or dealing with disease or illness is a setback meant to be overcome as much as possible, rather than being a pass to not stay active. Expectations have to be put in the parameters that your body is willing to manage at the time. Accepting what you have and moving on with those particular limitations will improve the way you age.

One of the biggest hurdles of growing older is the increased feelings of fatigue. The good news about that is that almost any physical activity will actually help to counteract feelings of being tired, because the activity increases blood flow and the strength of the heart to supply the exerting body with extra oxygen. Yoga and walking are great activities to help increase energy. They both focus on breathing and the yoga gets circulation to all parts of the body through its many postures and stretches.

The improved breathing and circulation in turn, gives us a feeling of more energy, alertness and less tension. Yoga can be modified for any condition or degree of disability and keeps seniors able to reach higher and lower than they may have been before. Walking is one of the most beloved forms of fitness around the world and is gentle on the joints with the right shoes.

Arthritis and other chronic pain ailments are also aspects of growing older which can try to take away all of your favorite activities, thereby taking away your health. Seniors across the country are raving about the effects of swimming on their joint pain. Some say that their symptoms are eliminated while in the water and subdued for quite a while afterwards. The warm water and

joy of being able to jog or do weight bearing exercises without pain are uplifting and rejuvenating. A few hours in the water each week will keep you feeling young and keep you limbered up to do other day to day activities which you need to perform?

Perhaps neck to neck with elements of a healthy lifestyle is the need for socialization. As seniors, an active lifestyle is best accentuated with active socializing. A blending of the two is a perfect match. Finding neighbors and friends who want to take exercise classes with you or become a partner for walking is one of the best ways to make staying fit fun. Joining a square dancing or ballroom dancing club will provide you with an environment of others who are motivated to stay fit and active.

Surrounding yourself with inspired, motivated individuals makes it much easier to stay motivated yourself. Dancing is extremely popular among seniors for providing this environment. It is also wonderful for keeping the heart light because dancing is full of whimsy and fun. If you like tennis, golf, basketball or other sports which take more than one, you will be giving yourself the tools to make aging a graceful process along with the opportunity to make lasting friendships.

Exercise is not meant to be a painful or lonely process, it is meant to eliminate those feelings as much as possible. By participating in activities which reduce elements of pain from chronic conditions, by increasing blood flow and oxygen intake, and by involving some social time in the mix, you can stay in the game for much longer. Remember that physical activity now makes future activity more accessible.

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