

Fit Seniors Enjoy Life More

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Did you know that moderate physical activity can help you live longer, and that it is safe for most older adults to exercise, even patients with chronic illnesses? Many health conditions can actually be improved through physical activity. Regular exercise helps control blood pressure, body weight, and cholesterol levels, and reduces the risks of hardening of the arteries, heart attack and stroke. Other benefits include conditioning of muscles, tendons, ligaments and bones to help fight osteoporosis, keep your body more limber, stabilize your joints, and lower the risk of everyday injury. Being active lowers your risk of falls and can help you maintain your independence longer. Physical activity is probably the best all-natural laxative you'll find, and it also is good for managing lower back pain, arthritis and diabetes. It also helps you sleep better, manage stress better, and gives you more endurance. However, if you are living with a chronic disease or if you are currently inactive, be sure to talk with a health care professional before beginning any new physical activity program.

You may be wondering how to get started. If you are not already active, begin slowly, starting with activities that you are already comfortable doing. Walking, for example, is an excellent activity to start with, as are swimming, gardening, or dancing. These will provide you with **aerobic activities**, which increase oxygen use to improve heart and lung function. They can help strengthen your heart and lower blood pressure and cholesterol. You can improve your muscle and bone health through **strengthening activities**, such as repetitive lifting of weights or engaging in other resistance exercises, using rubber resistance bands or tubing. To help prevent injuries and stiff joints, try to incorporate some **flexibility and balancing exercises**, such as tai chi, yoga, or stretching. All of these forms of exercise can also be done while seated in a chair – have you ever tried chair dancing or chair yoga?

It is important to choose activities that you enjoy, to ensure that you'll stick with them and make fitness part of your everyday life. Start slowly and gradually build up to a total of at least 30 minutes of moderate activity on most days of the week. Activities can be broken up into smaller blocks throughout the day, all counting towards your 30 minutes. Keep in mind that you do not have to exercise at a high intensity to obtain health benefits. Try to drink plenty of fluids while exercising, avoid outdoor activities in extreme cold or heat, and dress appropriately - always keep safety in mind. If you are not feeling well, due to a cold, flu, or other illness, wait until you feel better to resume your activity. Start slowly if you miss more than two weeks.

Look at your retirement or senior years as an opportunity to do things you never did before. Join the growing number of seniors who are actively demonstrating that exercise helps keep a body strong and on the go. Most of all, enjoy yourself!

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