



FITNESS
for Seniors

Prevent Falls

The National Institutes of Health states that more than a third of senior citizens experience a fall each year. A great risk of a fall-related injury is a hip fracture, which can cause serious health issues.

Practicing balance exercises will give you a stronger defense against falling. You can strengthen your body's ability to position itself anywhere by using simple exercises. Having control over your balance can make the difference between living independently or living with the assistance of professionals.

TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR

The first step in preventing falls is to discuss your fall risk with your doctor. Prepare for questions about your prescription medications, fall history or any health conditions that may put you at a higher risk of falling.

Certain conditions include joint pain, shortness of breath and even eye or ear disorders. Your doctor can tell you your level of risk and how you can approach lowering that risk.

IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Keeping yourself physically active will greatly enhance your chances of avoiding falls. Consistently walking, swimming or jogging also will strengthen your balance and coordination, giving you more confidence in your daily activities.

Discuss your fear of falling with your trainer. He can give



you a workout regime to follow that will be a great benefit to you and your health.

The NIH recommends a few at-home exercises for fall prevention:

- **Stand on one foot:** Be sure to stand next to something solid like table or wall.

- **Leg raises:** These exercises should be completed behind a sturdy chair. Perform side and back leg raises to strengthen your hips and thighs.

- **Walk heel to toe:** Take steps that end with your heel just in front of the toes on

your other foot. This exercise is great for improving balance.

MODIFY EXERCISES

Once you have a steady exercise program underway and you feel comfortable with your progress, change up some of the exercises.

A good way to challenge yourself with exercises involving chairs would be to use only one hand during these exercises. After that, switch to using just a single finger until you are able to perform these exercises with no hand assistance at all.

Make It Social

Having trouble finding motivation for this morning's trip to the gym? An exercise partner will make it easier to stick to your plan. Ask a friend to join you or find other seniors in your area who are interested in improving their health.

You will want to find someone who is in similar physical shape to you so you can keep up with each other and compare improvements.

JOIN A SENIOR CITIZEN FITNESS CENTER

Joining a gym that houses many different age groups may seem daunting in your senior years. You may get the feeling that you're not exactly fitting in or be discouraged due to not being able to keep up with the younger crowd.

The AARP has created a partnership with the International Council on Active Aging to increase awareness of age-friendly fitness centers across the country. They have created a locator tool which allows you to find these types of facilities in your local area.

You can find this very important tool at <http://www.icaa.cc/facilitylocator/facilitylocator.asp>. There, you can enter your location and reveal a list of age-friendly facilities in your area. There are even icons to describe the types of services they offer, an address and phone number. You may find it beneficial to call your local center to schedule a tour.

MORE ABOUT THE TOOL

There are several unique



benefits and features you may find useful when using AARP's new tool. For instance, only organizations committed to a code of conduct to accommodate seniors are allowed to enroll. They are required to provide age-specific programs

and follow all industry standards.

Another good tip is to look for centers that offer the AARP Walking program. You will notice a Silver Sneakers logo next to the centers that do.

You will want to find someone who is in similar physical shape to you so you can keep up with each other and compare improvements.

Benefits of Fitness Centers

One major perk of belonging to a gym is having an indoor area where you can exercise during extreme temperature conditions. Extreme heat or cold will not only make it more difficult for your body to perform during a workout but also may hinder your motivation.

You also will notice a sense of companionship when surrounded by like-minded people with the same goal in mind. Your fitness center will likely offer group classes. These will allow you to associate with many different people at once.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE JOINING

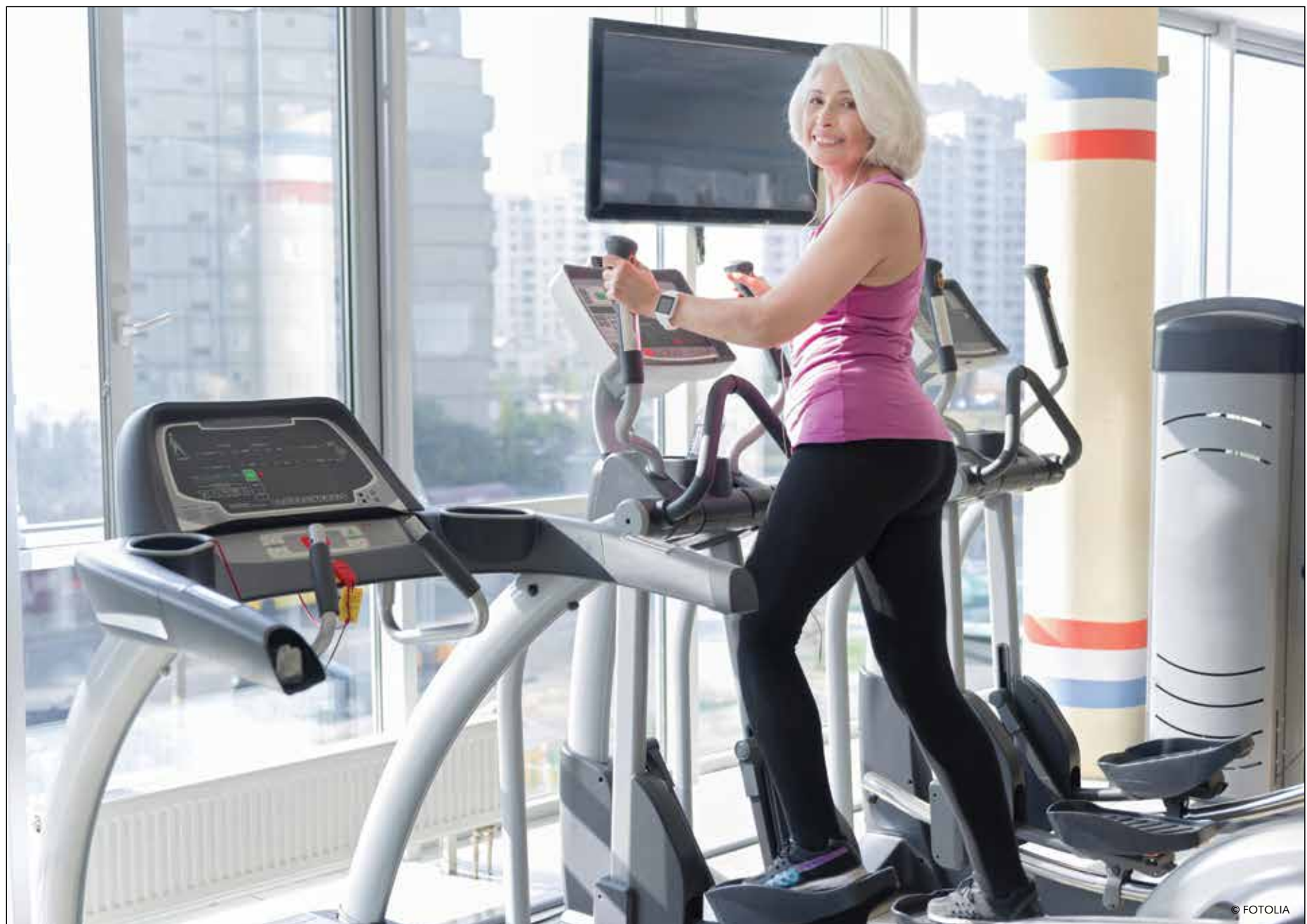
Once you find an age-friendly facility in your area, you should ask questions before you commit to joining. Be sure to ask about the staff's senior fitness certifications. Trainers who have received this special certification are familiar with exercise specifications for seniors.

They will be able to keep you safe by teaching you the proper way to perform exercises and use machines. Also ask about a fitness assessment before you begin training on any equipment.

MAKE A PLAN

A good starting point for your new gym routine is to create a plan. Your plan should consist of landmark goals and how you plan to achieve them. It's important to create realistic goals based on your current state of fitness.

Sticking to the solid plan that you create will allow you to regulate the amount of time you dedicate to your fitness.



You also will be able to use your plan to track progress and adjust it with more difficulty as you go.

SETTING GOALS

Creating goals for yourself

will keep your trips to the gym interesting and fulfilling. Whether it's a certain number you want to see on a scale or a certain spot you want to jog to, your goals should be within reason. Setting yourself up

with unrealistic goals may cause discouragement when you are unable to meet them. Once you get a good sense of the amount of physical activity your body can endure you will have a clearer idea of

what a realistic goal is. Pay attention to your exercise habits and your body's endurance, then set goals that cannot be easily obtained but aren't too unrealistic to achieve.

Determine Your Fitness Level

Keeping active is a necessity for anyone in their senior years. As your body ages, your muscles and bones begin to weaken. An important part of having a body that is efficient in repairing and maintaining itself is to keep up with physical activity and proper nutrition.

Deciding that you are ready to begin a regimen to get your body in better shape is the first step in protecting your health and longevity. It is important to know your level of fitness before you begin a strenuous routine that may put unnecessary pressure on your heart and joints.

This can be a collaborative process with your physician, so be sure to set up an appointment with him or her before taking on any new exercise activities.

ANALYZE YOUR CURRENT HABITS

Before beginning your new fitness plan, consider your everyday behavior. Exercising beyond your limits may result in you becoming frustrated and discouraged, eventually causing you to give up on a life of fitness.

Ask yourself how much time you spend sitting, how often you're active and what you're doing when you are active. Planning an exercise regimen that incorporates activities you are already participating in can lead to a successful workout.

TEST YOUR FITNESS

If you haven't lived an active lifestyle you will need to be careful while your body gets used to its new physically active workload. The National Institute on Aging has listed some ways you can test your-



self and your level physical capabilities.

- **Endurance test:** An easy way to see how your body reacts to physical activity is to time yourself walking a certain distance. Keep track of how your times differ and your body feels over a period of a week.

- **Strength test:** Test your upper- and lower-body strength by recording how many arm curls and chair stands you can do over a week.

- **Balance test:** Time how long you can safely stand on one foot. Be sure to administer this test near something sturdy in case you lose your balance.

IMPROVING FITNESS WEAKNESSES

These tests may expose a few weaknesses when it comes to your body. Start slow to improve these deficiencies.

Your endurance and strength can easily be improved by pushing yourself a little more each day. Walk an extra block

or do an extra set of curls than the day before.

Correcting your balance is also possible but may take more time. Try walking backwards, sideways or standing from a sitting position. Try these tips gradually and within the strategy you and your physician come up with.

Fitness Benefits

You are probably familiar with many of the health benefits you can gain from physical activity. Exercise assists in heart health, healthy bones and weight maintenance. You may be surprised to learn how exercise can protect seniors from dangerous diseases and decline in brain function.

Aging may provide an excuse for a lack of physical activity, as you may blame your lack of exercise on sore muscles or weak bones. But your senior years are when you should be focused on improving your physical health. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that seniors have more to gain than younger people.

BRAIN FUNCTION

It is a common rule that any exercise that benefits your heart is also promoting brain health. Increasing your heart rate allows oxygen to be pumped to your brain and creates hormones to aide in the growth of brain cells. An active exercise regimen has been shown to aide in the prevention of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

There are non-physical activities you can perform on top of a physical lifestyle to promote brain health. Some of these include a healthy diet, learning a foreign language or learning a musical instrument. Learning something new is great way to keep an aging mind active.

FIGHT DISEASES

The National Institutes of Health state that staying active can prevent or slow down many diseases. The Mayo



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Clinic has listed a few ways exercise helps hinder symptoms of several common diseases among seniors:

- **Diabetes.** Exercise assists in insulin more effectively managing your blood sugar. It also will control your weight,

which is a huge factor in your fight against diabetes.

- **Asthma.** Exercise has been shown to reduce the frequency and severity of asthma.

- **Arthritis.** Exercise will help manage pain associated with this disease. It also will main-

tain muscle strength in certain joints.

CONTROL STRESS

You may notice higher stress levels as you age. Physical activity can be a key component in managing stress by

improving your ability to get a good night's sleep and releasing stress-fighting endorphins.

It has been shown that physical exercise will decrease tension and stabilize moods, and aerobic exercise can have anti-anxiety effects.

Swimming Aerobics

If you are experiencing painful joints or muscles during your exercise routine, you should know the benefits of working out in the water. Water provides low-impact exercise that enables synovial fluid to supply your joints with nutrients and eliminate the forces caused by exercising on land.

BENEFITS IN THE WATER

By performing water-based exercises, you are taking advantage of a hydrostatic pressure that lowers your heart rate and helps blood pump even more efficiently than exercising on land. The AARP has laid out some other major benefits you will receive with water workouts:

- Working out in the water reduces your risk of overheating while exercising;
- There is no injury risk due to a fall; and
- Water's resistance will improve your posture, flexibility, balance and strength.

KEEPING SAFE IN THE POOL

While working out in the water can be safer than land exercises, there are a few things to consider before you jump in the pool.

Water pressure will spike your body's blood pressure. If you suffer from high blood pressure, it is a good idea to start out in the shallow end, allowing your body to get used to the water.

Remember that water provides extra resistance. Moving too fast may cause extra strain on your muscles or bones. Be sure to take it easy when you begin training under water until your body is used to the extra resistance.



WATER EXERCISES

Whether you decide to join a facility with a water-based exercise program or plan to exercise in your own pool, there are some common exercises you should know about.

Aqua jogging is a low-impact exercise that can be used for a great pre-workout. Performing this exercise is as easy as it sounds. Simply jog from one side of the pool to the other. Remember to go

slow at first and gradually speed up.

Leg lifts will improve your balance. Stand straight in the pool and alternate lifting each leg to the side and back down. Flutter kicking is another pop-

ular water exercise. To perform this, exercise just float with your stomach down and your head above water and kick your legs. This is a great way to get your heart pumping.

Cardio Health

As we age, our heart rate declines. This can lead to the heart and lungs pumping less oxygen to our muscles during physical exercise. If you have noticed a considerable amount of fatigue during exercise it may be due to this restriction of fuel to your muscles.

Just because you're fatigued doesn't mean you should give up on your physical goals. In fact, researchers have discovered that hardships in physical ability are impacted by inactivity more than aging. This means that regular physical activity can slow and sometimes even reverse some cases of physical decline.

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

If you are just beginning a new cardio regimen, it is important to know how far your body can go. Be sure to see your healthcare expert before beginning your new routine. Your health care professional can explain possible risks based on your physical health and medication you may take.

It is crucial that you do not push yourself to the point where breathing and talking becomes difficult during your workout. A good way to test yourself is to use The Talk Test, which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention created.

To perform this test, begin talking during your workout. If you can comfortably carry on a conversation but are unable to sing, you are at your body's ideal intensity zone. However, if even saying more than a few words is difficult, you will need to dial down your intensity level.



PRE-WORKOUT ACTIVITIES

If you prepare your body before your workout by engaging in light warm-up exercises and stretching, you

will likely see better results. Stretching will loosen up muscles and joints, making a safer and more comfortable exercise experience.

Allow yourself five minutes for a warm-up workout before engaging in more intense cardio. Some good pre-cardio workouts include

push-ups, marching in place and squats.

These exercises can get your blood pumping before your actual workout.