

Fitness for Seniors



How Fit Are You?

Take a baseline exam before getting started on a healthier lifestyle

Exercise is even more important as we age, but there are risks with overdoing it.

In particular if you have been less active for a while, diving into a new exercise regimen with too much gusto can lead to frustration, painful soreness and even injury. Yet it's still important to maintain a regular schedule of exercise in order to keep yourself in good shape.

You should always consult your doctor before making any big changes in your level of physical activity or your diet. Here are some other key factors in determining your fitness.

CURRENT HABITS

Muscles can shrink and bones become more brittle into our senior years, but exercise and proper nutrition can slow or even halt that process. Before you join that new gym, or set off on an ambitious run, take a good look at your current habits. Avoid exercising beyond your limits by determining how much time you spend sitting every day, how often you've been active in the last months and the exercise activities that you're taking part in. If you've been leading a more sedentary life, ease into your new plans. Start small and work your way up to larger goals.

FITNESS TESTS

You can monitor your own initial progress by conducting personal endurance testing. Time yourself walking over a prescribed distance and see how your body reacts. Is your heart rate too high, or are you breathing very fast? Shorten the length to begin with, and

then begin extending your walk as you get stronger. Keep track of your time as you walk for the most up-to-the-minute gauge on how you're improving. Start with only a few reps when doing arm curls, sit ups or other strength-building routines. Be on the look out for pain,

weakness or soreness. Finally, pay close attention to your balance. Track how long you can stand on one foot. Just make sure you're near the something sturdy to grab onto, if needed.

FOCUSING ON HEALTH

As you gather more infor-

mation, areas of improvement will become clear. You'll be building strength and endurance every day, as you push yourself a little bit more. Add an extra block, and then a few more and then a mile. Do an extra set with the weights, and watch as the benefits grow.



Why You Should Walk More

One of the easiest things you can do provides big dividends

You don't need any specialized equipment or gear, just a pair of good shoes and some wide-open spaces.

Researchers have confirmed that walking helps lower stress, regulate blood sugar and lower blood pressure. It can also help you control your weight.

Even just a few minutes of walking every day can lead to a noticeable boost in overall health. Do more, and you'll build the needed endurance to go further still.

Just remember to consult your doctor before starting. They will have specific recommendations that will help you tailor an exercise regimen to your specific needs and abilities.

START SLOWLY

The temptation may be to lace up and crisscross every sidewalk in your neighborhood. It's important to pace yourself, in particular early on, so that you don't overdo it. Beginning senior walkers should try five- or 10-minute intervals. You'll see better health and fitness without risking soreness or undue pain. Make sure you have sturdy but comfortable shoes, since they can be a ready cause of stumbles, falling, strains and stiffness.



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INCREASING INTENSITY

Once you've gotten into a regular routine, and can walk longer distances without tiring out or breathing too heavily, begin revving up. Varying your speed and intensity will have a greater impact on heart health and blood pressure problems. Inclines and interval settings on treadmills are a

great way to accomplish this goal, but you can also adapt your personal approach out in the real world. Find a slightly sloping hill in your neighborhood or park and circle back around to it often.

KEEP TRACK

Add a step-tracking app to your mobile phone, if it's not

already pre-installed. They can be a powerful tool in keeping up with how far you've come — while also serving as an aid in setting reasonable goals for where you'll go next. You might be surprised by how many steps you're taking while participating in everyday activities around the home and office, like dog walking or lawn

mowing. Set goals for how far you'll walk taking those organic steps in mind, and they might be more easily achieved than you ever imagined. Wearable technology like smart watches can also track your heart rate and other health data that will help as you continue reaching new heights.

The Role of Diet In Fitness

Working out isn't enough if you're still making poor food choices

Combine your physical fitness goals with a commitment to eating right in order to achieve a healthier lifestyle.

Even small tweaks to your diet can have a huge impact when combined with a smart workout plan, providing the energy you need while controlling your weight.

As with any exercise regimen, consult your doctor before making wholesale changes in your daily menu, in particular if you're on a special diet or unfamiliar with healthier choices.

WHAT YOUR BODY NEEDS

Pay attention to things like protein, which remains vitally important as we age. Higher consumption levels can reduce the symptoms of sarcopenia, the natural loss of muscle mass, function and strength among seniors.

Proteins help us recover from exercise regimens, maintain mobility and balance, and built and retain strength. Some 30% to 35% of your total caloric intake should include protein, according to medical professions. Protein also helps with absorption of vitamins, energy levels and concentration. As you ramp up your physical activity, it becomes even more crucial.



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MIXING THINGS UP

Eating right doesn't mean limiting your intake to salad or starving yourself. Keep yourself from boredom and hunger by mixing up your protein sources with healthier alternatives like fish, peas, chicken and beans. They're packed with nutrients, and can be prepared in a seeming-

ly endless number of ways. Incorporating more vitamin-rich vegetables in your life not only helps ensure wellness. They can be surprisingly filling. Promote your bone health by enjoying fat-free or low-fat dairy items that are fortified with vitamin D.

REWARD YOUR EFFORT

You've probably heard the

old saying about all work and no play. The same caution should be taken with your healthier diet. As you eat and exercise your way to wellness, don't forget to acknowledge the small victories that propel this journey. Indulge in a small dessert or favorite snack to avoid becoming discouraged. They can be a great reward for when you reach

that all-important next goal. Worried you might back slide too far? There are also a huge number of non-food rewards that may inspire you. Consider treating yourself to a massage, facial, manicure and pedicure, or spa day. Purchase a small gift for yourself, even if it's only a trip to the stylist. Then get back out there!

Getting Stronger

Weight regimens provide a host of preventative health benefits

Seniors shouldn't forget strength training for better balance, joint health and stability.

You'll also be warding away chronic diseases and everyday ailments. This kind of exercise is particularly important for women as they age, since they start out with lower bone density and muscle mass. But everyone can benefit from getting stronger.

Seek out specialized help from expert trainers to learn more about creating a program, or just start working out from the comfort of your own home. You can see significant results without a huge financial or time investment.

KNOW THE LINGO

Weight training has its own special language which you'll need to become familiar with, in particular if you're exercising in a gym setting. A repetition, or rep, is one completion of an exercise. So, if you complete 10 curls or 10 pull ups, that's 10 repetitions. A set is the entire group of repetitions. So if your goal was 10 curls, and you finish with 20, that's two sets. Don't over do it. Your final rep should be difficult to complete — but not impossible.

INDIVIDUALIZED ROUTINES

Dumb bells are ideal for



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weight training. They're flexible, portable tools that can be easily customized for beginners or experts, and can be adjusted as you gain strength. They can also utilized at home or at the gym. If you choose to workout at home, buy these weights individually so that you can confirm which ones

work best for your experience level and abilities. You'll also be spreading out the cost if your fixed-income budget won't allow for the purchase of a complete set of dumb bells all at once.

GETTING STARTED

Talk to your doctor before

beginning any new routine. Newcomers should start with curls. Hold the weights at your sides, then slowly bend the elbow until the weights are at shoulder level. Keep them there for a count of three, then allow them to fall back to your sides. Next, work your way up to an overhead press.

In this exercise, the weights are with elbow bent held at chest height. Slowly push the weights above your head, and again hold for three counts before lowering. Drink plenty of water as you go through these regimens, and stop immediately if you begin to feel pain.

The Benefits of Yoga

Centering exercises offer important wellness advantages for seniors

This isn't simply a young person's routine, with strange twists and impossible positions.

Like most exercise programs, yoga is offered in a variety of approaches based on skill, experience and flexibility. Many classes are geared especially for seniors.

Yoga also addresses different challenges faced as we age, with specialized benefits based on its almost endless adaptability as an exercise routine. A parallel focus on meditation and being centered is an important wellness tool for seniors of any era.

IN YOUR 50s

This isn't a highly aerobic activity, which is why many find it so relaxing. Those who practice yoga find that it addresses anxiety in their lives, and helps work out tension in their necks and backs. At the same time, however, yoga remains a calorie-burning activity — and that's particularly useful as our metabolism starts to slow into old age. Obesity is a factor in an assortment of more serious health problems, including heart disease and diabetes. Seniors who take part in regular activity like yoga have lower rates of both as well as stroke and high blood pressure, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

IN YOUR 60s

Poses are learned and then held, leading to improved flexibility and balance. This can be particularly important as the risk of the bone-weakening disease osteoporosis increases into our 60s. People suffering from this disease find that their bones break more easily with unexpected falls. Some

3 million older Americans go to the emergency room each year with related injuries, according to the CDC. Many seniors also battle insomnia, and that can worsen other health conditions. Yoga can help you fall asleep faster and stay asleep, because of its relaxing exertions and learned breathing techniques.

IN YOUR 70s

Yoga has been shown to sharply reduce stress, and can even help address hypertension. Notable drops in blood pressure have been reported by those who regularly practice yoga, because it's built on a foundation of measured breathing and quiet thoughtfulness. Yoga

also promotes joint health, an increasing problem for those in their 70s. Exercising regularly helps maintain your prized independence, since arthritis or carpal-tunnel syndrome can transform everyday activities like brushing your teeth or buttoning up a shirt into an excruciating experience.



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Focusing On Safety

Exercise can lead to a happier, healthier life — but be careful

Though the risk of injury is there for people of any age, seniors are particularly vulnerable.

Factors may include unfamiliarity with new routines, weakening of joints and bones, or simply overdoing it when starting a new exercise program. Manage your expectations as you begin, and as you progress.

You'll get stronger as you go, as long as you pay close attention to common issues that may crop up in the meantime. Here's a look.

BE HEART SMART

Keep a close eye on your heart rate during and after any physical activity. Changes in the amount of oxygen sent to the body through your blood because of overexertion can lead to sudden exhaustion, faintness or even a heart attack. Be aware of changes associated with aging like high blood pressure, since that can become exacerbated by doing too much — in particular early into your routine. Consider using an activity tracker to more closely monitor how your heart is doing, and be prepared to shorten or even stop your routine if your blood pressure is a concern.

STAY HYDRATED

Proper hydration when exercising is important for those of



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any age, since we lose water at a more increased rate through perspiration. As much as 75% of all Americans are actually living in a chronic state of dehydration, according to experts. This can be particularly dangerous if you're already dehydrated and then begin exercising. Bring a water bottle

along, and take regular breaks to drink. Consider adding a sugar-free flavoring, if you're not inclined to drink water all by itself. Set a timer if you yourself forgetting to hydrate along the way.

PROTECT YOURSELF

Discuss your health regimen

with your doctor before beginning. Consulting with a trainer may also help you craft routines that will help keep you safe from pain, sprains or injury. If you're headed outside, be aware of the dangers of the sun. The risk of heat-related issues is heightened with physical activity, so take time to rest

in a shady place. Protect yourself from burns and lessen your risk of skin cancer by using a sunscreen with a rating of SPF 30 or more. Purchase a comfortable hat, and the right shoes. Then push yourself to do more, but not to the point of collapse. Building strength is a marathon, not a sprint.

How To Avoid Falls

A few simple steps can help ensure you don't experience a mishap

As many as one-third of seniors suffer a fall every year, according to the National Institutes of Health.

But you don't have to be one of them. Recommended precautions coupled with a few targeted exercises can lower your risk.

Balance is a key element, along with awareness of the hazards that surround your daily life. Living upstairs and certain medications may increase your likelihood. These falls are particularly hazardous if there's an associated hip injury.

Here's how to avoid falls.

CONSULT A PRO

Talk about your fall risks with your doctor, since they'll be intimately familiar with your prescription medications, related health conditions and history of injury. Joint pain, eye or ear disorders and shortness of breath can also be key indicators for potential falls. Medical professionals can offer helpful advice to help limit these risks. They might also adjust your prescriptions, in certain instances. Trainers can also help tailor a regimen just for you. Easier weight-bearing activity like climbing stairs or walking can actually slow down osteoporosis, a disease that weakens your bones.



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GET PHYSICAL

Many older adults end up taking bigger risks because they're afraid of falling. They may avoid shopping, walking or certain social activities in a misguided effort to keep themselves safe. But being inactive actually increases your chances of a fall. Any form of exercise where you're moving your body can help

lower these risks, but pay particular attention to balance routines that will provide a better defense against a fall by strengthening your core. Walking, jogging and swimming are some of the most convenient and easiest exercises, and they help with both coordination and balance. Your confidence will grow by leaps and bounds, while

extending the period of time you can live independently.

RECOMMENDED EXERCISES

Small changes can make a big difference when it comes to falls. Leg raises, done from a behind a sturdy chair, strengthen your hips and thighs. The National Institutes of Health also recommend

walking heel to toe and standing on one foot, in order to strengthen your balance. As you get stronger through a steady exercise program, begin using only one hand on the chair exercises. Then switch to only a single finger, and continue working until you can complete this routine without any assistance from your hand.