

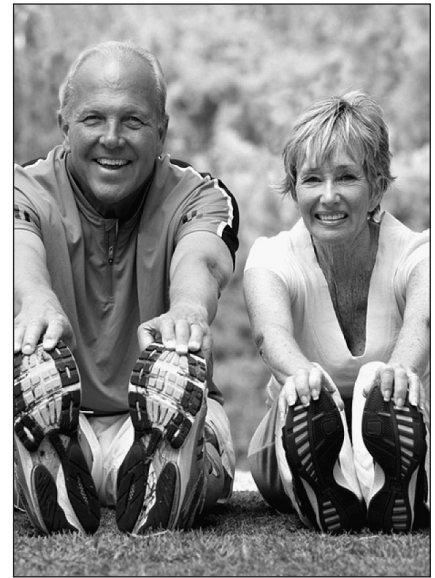
Healthy Aging: Both Physically and Mentally

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Educational Objectives

1. Understand the physical and psychological health benefits of physical activity.
2. Know the physical activity recommendations for older adults.
3. Learn ways to incorporate more physical activity into your daily routine.

While research shows that physical activity (or exercise) provides many health benefits for people of all ages, older adults gain even more health benefits than their younger counterparts. Physical activity and exercise are good for our hearts, waistlines and bone health. Living a physically active lifestyle can help older adults stay strong and fit, allowing them to keep doing the things they enjoy during their daily routine. Making exercise and physical activity a regular part of one's life not only improves health, but even more important it helps maintain independence with age.



Maintaining a Healthy Weight

Maintaining a healthy weight is important for overall health and well-being. As one grows older, continuing to eat the same types and amounts of food while not maintaining or increasing one's activity level, will most likely result in weight gain. The potential weight gain is because metabolism (how you burn the calories you eat) can slow down with age. Because muscle mass (muscle mass increases one's metabolism) is lost with age, we are not able to burn off as many calories as we once were.

The secret to maintaining a healthy weight is to balance “energy in” and “energy out.” Energy in means the calories you get from the food and beverages you consume. Energy out means the calories you burn for basic body functions and during physical activity. To maintain your weight, you need to burn the same number of calories that you consume (eat or drink). To lose weight, you must burn more calories than you consume, and to gain weight, you must burn fewer calories than you consume.

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Other ways to maintain a healthy weight are to:

- Limit portion sizes to help control calorie intake.
- Add more physical activity into your daily routine. For example, take the stairs instead of the elevator or park farther away from store entrances.
- Keep hydrated with water and limit or eliminate sugar-sweetened beverages from your diet.
- Add resistance training (muscle-building or strengthening) to your routine.



Health Benefits of Leading a Physically Active Lifestyle

In addition to weight maintenance, physical activity has many benefits to overall physical health with age.

- Physical activity reduces the impact of illness and chronic disease. Among the many benefits of exercise for adults over 50 include improved immune function, better heart health and blood pressure, better bone density, and better digestive functioning. Research has also shown that those who exercise on a regular basis also have a lowered risk of several chronic conditions including diabetes, obesity, heart disease, osteoporosis and certain types of cancer.
- Physical activity enhances mobility, flexibility and balance in older adults. Exercise improves your strength, flexibility and posture, which in

turn will help with balance, coordination and reducing the risk of falls. Strength training also helps alleviate the symptoms of chronic conditions, such as arthritis.

- Physical activity improves immune function. A healthy strong body fights off infection and sickness more easily and quickly, making recovery from unexpected illnesses much easier.



What Is Good for Your Body Is Also Good for Your Brain

In addition to its effects on physical health, there is now strong evidence that exercise and physical activity have a significant impact on several cognitive and psychological factors as well. In fact, according to the American College of Sports Medicine, there is now considerable evidence that regular physical activity is associated with significant improvements in overall psychological health and well-being.

- Both overall fitness levels and aerobic exercise training have been shown to decrease one's risk for both clinical depression and anxiety. In addition, older adults that report living a more physically active lifestyle have been shown to have better self-esteem and self-concepts.
- A myriad of recent studies have linked participation in regular physical activity with a reduced risk for dementia or cognitive decline in older adults. In fact, several studies have shown that even single bouts of exercise can result in improvement to



short-term memory, attention and tasks related to cognitive performance.

- Recent studies have explored the relationship between resistance training and cognitive function. Preliminary results have shown resistance training can also improve several aspects of psychological health, including improving depression, anxiety and overall quality of life.

Simple Tips for Beginning and Maintaining a Physically Active Lifestyle

- According to the American College of Sports Medicine, women who are 55 years of age and older, and men who are 45 years of age and older are generally thought to be at higher risk and may need to seek the advice of a physician before beginning an exercise program.
- More focus should be placed on increasing the amount of time spent in activities that are of a moderate intensity rather than those that are high-intensity or vigorous.
- Activities should be enjoyable or fun.
- Social support is an important factor related to exercise adherence. Exercising with a friend or a companion not only adds to increased enjoyment, it has also been shown to increase exercise compliance.
- Both muscular adaptation and elasticity decrease with age; therefore, it is important that older adults properly warm up and cool down before and after exercise.
- If exercise or physical activity lasts 30 minutes or longer, water should be consumed every 15 minutes. With age, sense of thirst decreases and dehydration occurs more often.

Common Myths About Exercise and Aging

Myth 1: Older people shouldn't exercise. They should save their strength and rest.



Fact: A sedentary lifestyle is unhealthy for adults over 50. Inactivity often causes older adults to lose the ability to do things on their own and can lead to various medical issues.

Myth 2: Exercise puts me at risk of falling down.

Fact: Regular exercise prevents loss of bone mass and improves balance, actually reducing the risk of falling.

Myth 3: There's no point to exercising. I'm already too old to start.

Fact: Exercise and strength training help you look and feel younger and stay active longer. If you've never exercised before, or it's been a while, start with light walking and other gentle activities. Regular physical activity lowers your risk for a variety of health conditions.

Beneficial Physical Activities for Older Adults:

- *Walking.* Walking is a perfect way to start exercising. It requires no special equipment, aside from a pair of comfortable walking shoes, and can be done anywhere.
- *Senior sports or fitness classes.* These activities keep you motivated while also providing a source of fun, stress relief and a place to meet friends.



• *Water aerobics and water sports.* Working out in water is wonderful for seniors, because water reduces the stress and strain on the body's joints.



- *Yoga.* This activity combines a series of poses with breathing. Moving through the poses works on strength, flexibility and balance. Yoga can be adapted to meet all ability levels.
- *Resistance training or strength-training exercise.* Strength-training exercise should be done on two or more days of the week and should involve major muscle groups. These types of exercises can be done by lifting weights, using resistance bands, or simply using one's own body weight.

References

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