

Fitness for Seniors



How Fit Are You?

As our bodies age, we tend to lose muscle and bone strength. That's why maintaining an active lifestyle is essential in our senior years.

Getting started, however, can be difficult — particularly if you haven't been regularly engaging in physical activity. So, evaluate your general health before starting a fitness program.

That includes assessing your current fitness level with a healthcare professional, especially if you intend to take part in an intense exercise routine. They'll help you create a comprehensive approach that puts you on the right track without unnecessary strain. Here are a few things to discuss:

YOUR EXISTING HABITS

Before beginning your new fitness journey, consider your everyday routine. It's important not to do too much too early. Overexertion can lead to injury and frustration — and it might just potentially derail your entire plan. Create an approach that considers the time you've been spending sedentary, how frequently you've been engaging in physical activity, and how strenuous those activities may have been. If possible, include exercises that you already enjoy to ensure a more successful initial experience.

YOUR FITNESS LEVELS

If you haven't been leading an active lifestyle, approach new activities with caution. Your body will need time to adapt to these increased demands. Discuss your general endurance, strength and balance with a health professional and trainer. To determine your endurance, begin by walking a

specific distance. Over the course of a week, monitor the time it takes and how your muscles and respiratory systems react. You can evaluate your upper and lower body strength by counting the number of chair stands or arm curls you can perform over the same week-long period. Measure how long you can

maintain your balance on one foot. (Always conduct this test near a stable object for safety.)

GETTING STARTED

Begin gradually, building endurance and strength by slightly increasing your efforts each day. That might mean walking an additional block, doing a few more reps or

lifting a little bit more. Improving your balance is achievable but may require more time. Try activities such as walking sideways or backward. Repeatedly rise from a seated position to standing without any aid. As with any other exercise regimen, discuss any questions or concerns with your healthcare provider.



Importance of Exercise

There are numerous health advantages associated with physical activity — so get out there!

Regular exercise contributes to seniors' cardiovascular health, aids in weight management and strengthens bones. It also plays a crucial role in safeguarding older adults against cognitive decline and serious illnesses.

Ironically enough, however, aging is sometimes used as an excuse to reduce physical activity, whether because of worries over our fragile bodies or everyday muscle soreness. This is actually the era of life where you need to prioritize your physical well-being.

There are larger benefits, too: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has found that older adults can benefit more from exercise than their younger counterparts.



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COGNITIVE FUNCTION

Exercises that are understood to be beneficial for the heart also enhance brain health. Elevating your heart rate helps with the delivery of oxygen to the brain – and that, in turn, stimulates the production of hormones that support the growth of brain cells. Creating and maintaining a consistent exercise routine has been linked to a reduced risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

Related activities that complement a physically active lifestyle while further improving brain health include puzzles, games or learning a different language or a musical instrument. These experiences are an excellent way to keep the mind sharp as we age.

COMBAT ILLNESSES

The National Institutes of Health notes that seniors with

active lifestyles are often able to prevent or mitigate common health conditions associated with aging. Here are some of the ways physical activity alleviates symptoms of common ailments in older adults:

Arthritis: Exercise can help with chronic pain linked to arthritis, while helping us retain muscle strength around affected joints.

Diabetes: Regular exercise increases insulin efficiency in regulating blood sugar levels and aids in weight management, another crucial element in combating diabetes.

Asthma: Physical activity has been proven to lessen both the intensity and frequency of asthma attacks.

MANAGE STRESS

Stress levels may increase

as we age, whether because of worries about money, family or our financial situation. Engaging in regular physical activity can play a vital role in managing those complex feelings.

You'll be releasing endorphins that combat stress and promoting better sleep. Research indicates that exercise can reduce tension and stabilize our moods.

Better Health with Cardio

Our heart rate changes as we age. High blood pressure can be an issue — but so can lower heart rates.

If yours declines, the heart and lungs will pump less oxygen to your muscles while exercising. That can lead to a considerable amount of fatigue. Don't let these initial feelings of fatigue keep you from achieving your goals.

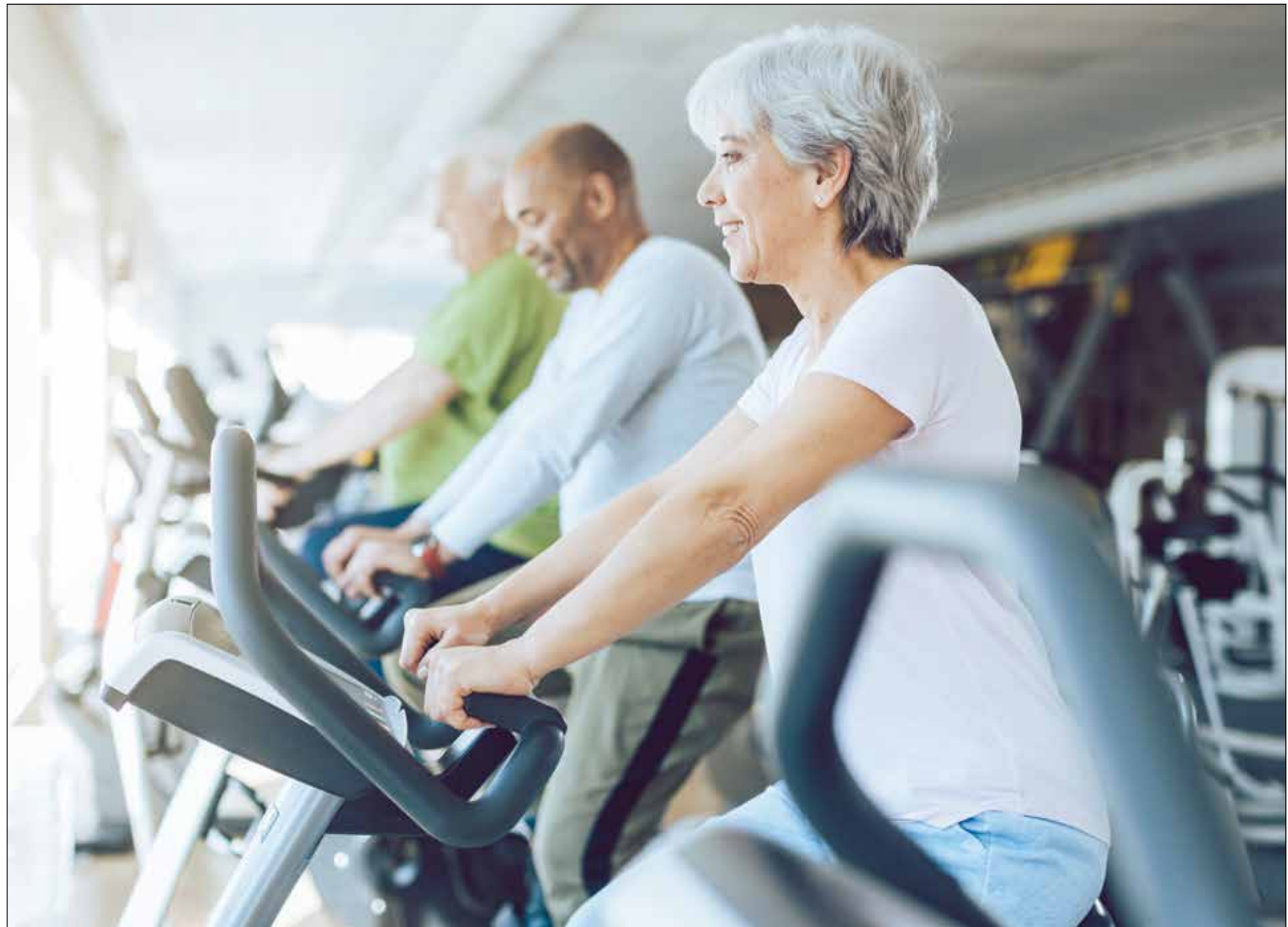
If you're feeling unusually tired when starting a new exercise routine, it might be because your body simply needs more fuel for your muscles. Consider adding more cardio to strengthen your heart and lungs. You'll be setting the stage for more success in other areas of exercise — and that's critically important for seniors.

Researchers have confirmed that our health can be affected more by inactivity as we grow older. At the same time, regular exercise can slow and even reverse the physical decline associated with aging.

Here's how to get started on this journey toward better heart health:

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

When beginning a new cardio regimen, set realistic goals. Don't push yourself too far — particularly at first. Consult with a healthcare professional before starting any routine. An expert can explain



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any possible risks based on your individual physical health and the medications you take. If breathing becomes difficult at any time during your workout, stop immediately and rest.

PRE-WORKOUT

Don't jump right in. Prepare your body before any workout by stretching and then

engaging in light warm-up exercises. You'll be better prepared, lessen the chance of injury and ultimately see better results. Stretching loosens muscles and joints, creating a more comfortable, safer exercise experience.

Allow five minutes for warm-ups before engaging in more intense cardio activity. Among the most

recommended pre-cardio workouts are push-ups, squats and marching in place.

These exercises get your blood pumping, setting the stage for a more vigorous workout.

A HANDY TEST

Newcomers are directed to the Talk Test, created by the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention. It's meant to signal when cardio exercises have become too rigorous. Begin talking as your workout gets underway.

At the ideal intensity, you can comfortably carry on a conversation — but are unable to sing. If you find that saying more than a few words is difficult, that's a signal to lower the intensity level.

A Senior Focus on Flexibility

Stretching is often either overlooked or forgotten altogether.

But this isn't something to simply rush through before getting on with a more intense workout – in particular for older adults. Because of the effects of aging, stretching creates a safe and productive exercise routine.

Seniors may find that muscles and joints have weakened, leading to restricted range of motion. Proper stretching restores some of that flexibility, while providing notable health advantages: The Journal of Physiology found that stretching five times a week over a month-long period can actually improve blood circulation to the lower legs.

Here's how to properly integrate stretching into your fitness routine:

HAMSTRINGS

Begin here. The hamstrings can become strained during physical activities – and they don't have to be overly vigorous. They even happen while walking or taking a light jog. Further exercising and even some everyday activities can become very painful, so remember to stretch this muscle group.

The optimal stretch involves sitting sideways on a bench or flat surface. Maintain an upright posture while keeping one foot on the floor then extend the other leg onto the bench. Keep your toes pointing upward. Continue until



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you begin to feel a slight pull in your hamstring, then maintain that position for 10 to 30 seconds. Switch to the other leg and repeat.

ARMS AND SHOULDERS

Next, focus on the arms and shoulders. Position yourself at a distance greater than an

arm's length from a wall, with your feet positioned shoulder-width apart. Keep your back straight as you gradually raise your hands along the wall until they are comfortably positioned above your head. Hold this position for another 10 to 30 seconds before lowering your arms.

BACK

To help prevent unnecessary strain on your back, sit near the edge of a chair with your feet flat on the floor. Maintain the same upright position while bending forward at the hips, sliding your hands down your legs until you reach your shins. Hold

this position for 10 to 30 seconds, then rise slowly once you've finished stretching.

Continue all these warm-up stretches until you feel loose and ready to go. As with any regimen, it's important not to take things too far. Overstretching can lead to aches and pains, too.

Forging Healthier Eating Habits

Physical fitness and nutrition are interconnected in maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Eat balanced meals while engaging in a consistent exercise regimen and you'll reach fitness goals while boosting your overall energy levels.

Even minor adjustments to your diet can lead to significant improvements in your overall well-being. Just be sure to seek advice from qualified professionals if you have specific dietary restrictions, are unsure about the effects of certain choices or have a pre-existing condition.

DIVERSIFY YOUR DIET

Healthy eating isn't limited to bland shakes, the same old salads or microscopic portions. There are many appetizing ways to incorporate nutritious foods into your meals. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics recommends experimenting with various protein sources to keep your healthy eating enjoyable. Chicken, fish, beans and peas are all rich in this essential nutrient.

Increase your intake of fruits and vegetables throughout the day. If you find yourself hungry between meals, these nutrient-dense choices can help satisfy your craving. Aim for three servings of low-fat or fat-free dairy products fortified with vitamin D each day to support bone health.



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FOCUS ON WHAT'S IMPORTANT

Healthy lifestyles are built on a combination of diet and exercise. What you eat has a direct effect on both. For instance, protein aids in muscle recovery following physical activity. As you grow stronger, you'll also have improved balance – two key factors in sustaining the

mobility that older adults require for independence.

Increased protein intake has been shown by university researchers to slow the rate of decline in muscle mass, functionality and strength. It's essential for the absorption of other key vitamins. The recommended level of protein intake is 30-35% of total daily calories. Other studies have

shown that the proper levels of protein can help reduce cholesterol and blood pressure levels, boost energy and aid in concentration. That's why a protein-rich diet is so vital for seniors who lead active lifestyles.

MAKE TIME TO CELEBRATE

As you move toward a

healthier lifestyle, it's important not to become so focused on these new goals that you overlook the many achievements along the way.

Celebrate milestones with a moment of small indulgence. Looking forward to them might serve as a motivational tool as you strive for the next key objective in your health journey.



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Benefits of Pool Exercising

Seniors may be particularly susceptible to muscle or joint pain during everyday workouts. If they've become a problem for you, consider switching to water exercising.

These aquatic workouts offer a low-impact environment that eases the pressure on joints, while minimizing the jarring impact and gravitational stress associated with exercising on land. Here's a look:

BIG ADVANTAGES

The benefits of exercising in water don't end with low impacts. Being in water can actually enhance blood circulation and lower your heart rate in ways that traditional workouts can't.

These regimens are naturally resistant to overheating. Another key benefit of a water-based fitness routine is a significantly lowered risk of injury from falls. Water's natural resistance also contributes to improved balance, flexibility, posture and strength.

SAFETY CONCERNS

Aquatic workouts are generally safer than exercising on land, but they're not without danger. Water can lead to a feeling of slight weightlessness, but

there is additional resistance. Avoid moving too quickly as that might create additional stress on muscles, joints and bones. Ease into your routine, adding additional time or reps as you get stronger. If you are dealing with hypertension, you may need to acclimate to the water pressure. Begin in the shallow end and allow your system to get used to these new surroundings.

BEST EXERCISES

Consider signing up for a water-based exercise program at a local facility or work out in your backyard pool. Either way, begin with standard fundamentals as you work your way toward better health. Jogging in water is a low-impact aerobic activity that

can serve as a stand-alone exercise or a helpful warm-up. Simply run from one end of the pool to the other. Start slowly before gradually increasing the pace. As you go along, lift your legs higher to help strengthen your balance.

You can stand still in the water and alternate lifting one leg straight up and then to the side before lowering it back down. Once you're ready to swim, take advantage of the most comfortable swimming stroke and swim an increasing number of laps. If you want to build lower-body strength instead, simply float with your head above the water and kick your legs. Flutter kicking is also an excellent way to elevate your heart rate.

Better Health with Technology

It's never been easier to keep track of your everyday activities, from steps taken to water consumption to sleep.

These fitness tracking devices are also handy, often finding a home inside a watch. As a result, their popularity soared. Still on the fence about making this key investment in your health? Here are a handful of benefits associated with trackers:

ACCOUNTABILITY

Activity trackers do more than keep up with your daily activity. They also help gauge your progress. You can compare stats on a daily, weekly, monthly or yearly basis, shaping your fitness routine around activity goals. Keep making strides in this journey and you'll see steady improvement in your physical health.

AWARENESS

Many activity tracker models also continuously monitor your heart rate. These automatic readings, typically straight from your wrist, can help you determine how hard to work while exercising. After all, you don't want to overdo it.

GOALS

As you continue working with an activity tracker, set new personal fitness goals and then work toward them.



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It's important that these goals are personalized. Others might be at a different point in their fitness process that's not appropriate for you to mimic. Aim to gradually increase these numbers along a reasonable path toward your overall goal. Continue to pay close attention to where you began.

The progress made will be remarkable.

FASHION

Though certainly not its most critical feature, fashion has become synonymous with activity trackers.

Many people find the modern versions to be so attractive that they wear these trackers even when they aren't actively exercising. There are now interchangeable accessories that can be switched out so they more

closely match an outfit.

MOTIVATION

Entry-level trackers can be reasonably affordable, but higher-end models can get quite pricey. If you opt for one of the more expensive models, think of the investment as a motivating factor to work harder while taking advantage of all the technological benefits.

Continue working to get the

most for your money.

REMINDERS

The reminder features on fitness trackers are an invaluable tool for those times when motivation or attention are lacking.

They leap into action when seniors are stationary for a set amount of time, reminding us to get up and move around. They also help guide us toward our exercise goals.