

## Active Aging: Physical Activity is Key to Healthy Aging

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Physically active lifestyles can benefit everyone. No one expects to live forever, but staying physically active prolongs the years of productivity and supports the highest possible quality of life. For older adults, physical activity is particularly important as it can promote overall health and prevent changes often associated with aging that affect independence.

According to the World Health Organization, many older adults who engage in physical activity do so simply because it can be fun and enjoyable. However, there is ample evidence to show that physical activity is also associated with significant improvements in functional ability and health status. Increased endurance can lead to improvement in cardio-respiratory function and strength training helps offset much of the age-related loss in muscle mass and strength. Many studies have shown that physical activity can also help prevent disease and chronic conditions, enhance the effects of rehabilitation and reduce the risk for falls.

The movement towards an active lifestyle is important for each of us. However, structured exercise classes are no longer

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viewed as the only means for gaining benefits from physical activity. An assortment of physical activities such as walking, swimming, dancing and even household chores of a physical nature are now considered valuable and essential. "Exercise is extremely important, as powerful a medicine as any of the pills I prescribe," said geriatrician Dr. Robert Stall. "Exercise is natural. It's something we used to do all the time when we didn't have a sedentary lifestyle because of all our modern technological advances. It's something we need to get back to."

To improve endurance, it is recommended that older adults try to build up to a total of 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week - even 10-minute increments of strolling count towards the daily total. To improve muscular strength, weight-bearing exercises such as lifting weights are most beneficial. To improve flexibility, move the entire body to promote range of motion. To improve balance and coordination, seek activities that require different movements through a variety of positions and directional changes like tai chi.

According to a recent study, moderate exercise can even help older adults with arthritis ease their pain and fatigue. Past research has shown that exercise may help older adults forestall the disabling effects of arthritis. The more recent study found if older adults with arthritis regularly exercise they can expect improvements in symptoms, self-efficacy for arthritis management and upper and lower extremity function.



When it comes to our fitness, the old adage applies: "Use it or lose it." With physical activity and aging, there is lots of good news. It is never too late to become physically active and no one is too old to enjoy the benefits of regular exercise. Physical activity can improve your ability to function well and remain independent in spite of health problems. Few factors contribute as much to successful aging as having a physically active lifestyle. So start now to invest a small amount of time each day in becoming more active – and it will produce big dividends in an improved lifestyle and better overall health.