

Fitness Over 40

By Kim Siegel, Personal Trainer

At what age is it too late to begin a fitness program?

The answer is simple – it is never too late to start a fitness program. As we age, staying active becomes even more important. We are never “too old” to exercise. The longer we continue to use our bodies, the longer our bodies will stay healthy and in good working order.

According to The American Institute for Cancer Research, physical activity reduces our risk of heart disease, adult diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. Regular activity plays an important role in the prevention of cancer. Studies show that physical activity reduces the risk of breast cancer in women up to 50%. Research suggests cancer survivors’ exercising regularly experience decreased pain and speedier recovery times allowing them to resume regular activities in less time. Being a survivor myself, I can testify that one of the reasons I was able to recover so quickly was because I started exercising beginning the second week following my surgery. I regained 100% range of motion in my arm within two weeks of surgery.

The U.S. Surgeon General warns that by the year 2020, 50% of Americans age 50+ will be at a risk of fracturing a bone weakened by osteoporosis. According to the Center for Disease Control more than 50% of U.S. adults do not get enough physical activity to provide health benefits, and another 24% are not active at all. Research finds that working out at higher levels of intensity promotes from 1 to 2% gains in bone density within the first six months alone.

Are you contemplating surgery? Studies show that weight training and cardiovascular exercise may be just the ticket for patients preparing for knee or hip-replacement surgery. Patients who took part in a one-hour exercise program three times a week were 73% less likely to be discharged to a rehabilitation facility.

What does this mean to you? It’s time to get started!

First of all, you should consult your physician before beginning any exercise program.

If you are new to exercise or if you have taken a break for a while, the secret is to begin slowly and build from there. For arthritis sufferers or women with other physical limitations I suggest beginning with water aerobics. You should then move on to stationary bikes, weight training and flexibility exercises.

For others I suggest beginning with 20–30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise three times a week at 60% of your maximum heart rate (220 – your age). After 3 weeks, increase to 70% of your maximum heart rate, and after 6 weeks, increase to 80% of your maximum heart rate (180 – your age). Your exercise may consist of aerobics classes, cycling, treadmill, elliptical, etc.

Weight training should consist of workouts two times a week, not on consecutive days, being sure to work all opposing muscle groups. For maximum effectiveness, combine this with a good core-strengthening program.

Flexibility and balance exercises should include proper stretching after both your cardiovascular as well as your weight-training workout. As we age our muscles tend to shorten and become tight. It is extremely important to stretch them out to promote proper posture as well as to correct any postural deficiencies.

If you are trying to lose weight it is very important to keep in mind that fat loss through diet alone can lead to loss of bone mass. You need to incorporate weight-bearing exercises to make up for the fat loss in order to maintain your bone density.

Growing old is no longer about deterioration and illness. Keep both your mind and body toned. Physical exercise promotes vitality, mental sharpness, physical strength, balance, and overall wellness. Even if you have never exercised, it's not too late to start! You'll have more energy, be steadier on your feet, be less likely to fall and best of all – you will extend your useful life.

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