

Physical Activity: Even More Important as We Age, August 2018



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We've all seen that older person who not only looks terrific, but can walk the boardwalk at the beach on a beautiful spring day without breaking a sweat. They seem to have energy to do all sorts of wonderful things from hiking in the woods to playing with grandchildren on a family vacation.

Just A Number?

So is age just a number? While it's certainly good to exercise regularly beginning at an early age, it's never too late to start being more physically active, thereby reaping the many benefits, even for those 55 years of age and older. And while we can't completely prevent age-related declines in cognitive and physical function, as a 2016 article in the periodical *Biogerontology* points out, "evidence shows that regular physical activity helps to improve physical and mental functions, as well as reverse some effects of chronic disease, thereby keeping older people mobile and independent. In addition, the risks of developing major cardiovascular and metabolic diseases, obesity, falls, cognitive impairments, osteoporosis and muscular weakness are decreased by regularly completing activities ranging from low intensity walking to more vigorous sports and resistance exercises."

Tips on Aging and Physical Activity

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the loss of strength and stamina attributed to aging is in part due to reduced physical activity. And inactivity increases with age (by age 75, about one in three men and one in two women engage in absolutely no physical activity). To avoid this, start moving now. Here are some tips:

- First off, it's important to remember that physical activity need not be strenuous to achieve health benefits.
- Doing any physical activity is better than doing none.

- Be active on most, preferably all, days of the week. Health professionals and researchers recommend a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity.
- Increases in daily activity can come from small changes made throughout one's day, if possible. These can include taking the stairs instead of an elevator, walking instead of using the car, parking a distance from the store or movie theatre, limiting the time you spend sitting in front of a computer screen.
- When a person reaches 40 years of age or above, they start to lose muscle (sedentary people lose about 15% of their muscle mass each decade after 50 and 30% each decade after 70). Also, bone density reduces and one's metabolism slows down resulting in weight gain as we start to store fat more easily.
- Having an active social circle helps. Studies show that participation in physical activity is more likely when significant others approve and when people have larger social networks.

Get Moving to Improve Your Mood

A number of studies have found a powerful connection between mental and physical fitness and that exercise helps reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression and fosters improved self-esteem. When you exercise your body releases chemicals called endorphins, which interact with the receptors in your brain triggering a positive feeling. Even more beneficial than exercising alone is exercising with a group, as it's a terrific opportunity for increased social contact which can also enhance a feeling of well-being and be mentally stimulating. It's a win-win! Many communities offer inexpensive and age appropriate fitness classes for older adults.

Recreational Outlets are Key

It's vital that retirement communities provide indoor and outdoor recreational outlets and activities for residents. Like many life plan retirement communities, Jefferson's Ferry offers fitness classes taught by a certified senior fitness professional ranging from gentle to advanced, including chair yoga, mat Pilates, stretching and relaxation, dance, ping pong and walking and swim programs. In the warmer months, residents flock to the outdoor recreation areas for croquet, bocce, shuffleboard and a putting green. Whether you reside in a life plan or other retirement community or a single family home, start investing in your future now. Become physically active and incorporate exercise into your daily routine. Before you know it, you will have increased

energy and will enjoy a greater sense of well-being ... and you will be able to hike that trail or climb those steps without feeling winded.