

FitFacts®

Fitness for Older Adults – Frequently Asked Questions

THINKING ABOUT BECOMING MORE ACTIVE OR STARTING A STRUCTURED FITNESS PROGRAM? GOOD FOR YOU! MANY STUDIES UNDERSCORE THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF EXERCISE AT ANY AGE. TO HELP YOU GET STARTED, WE'VE GATHERED A LIST OF FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT FITNESS FOR OLDER ADULTS.

I haven't exercised in years — Why should I start now?

Even if you've never been active, it's never too late to reap the many health benefits of regular exercise. Regular cardiovascular exercise, such as brisk walking, bicycling or swimming strengthens the heart and muscles, boosts energy and endurance. It also helps control blood sugar and cholesterol levels and works as a natural mood elevator.

Being sedentary raises the risk for developing such serious health conditions as diabetes and heart disease.

Strength exercise, or resistance training, helps preserve muscle tissue and bone health. It'll help you stay strong, so you can go about your normal daily activities.

I have several medical conditions — Is exercise safe for me?

Consult with your health care provider before starting an exercise program. Ask about precautions specific to your condition and which exercises are beneficial and safe for you. Regular exercise helps manage health conditions and can speed up the recovery process of serious illnesses, including heart attack, stroke and joint-replacement surgery. Your doctor may recommend that you start exercising in a medically-supervised setting before you exercise on your own.

Which exercises are easy on the joints?

Water exercises (swimming, water walking) or non weight-bearing exercises (bicycling, rowing, elliptical machines) are easier on the joints and often recommended for people with joint issues. However, your health care provider may recommend some weight-bearing exercises (walking, jogging) to protect and strengthen your bones.

How much exercise is enough?

Start with 5 minutes or whatever you can manage, then gradually work up to 30 minutes a day of cardiovascular exercise most days of the week. You should notice a difference in how you feel within 6-8 weeks. Perform muscle-strengthening exercises twice weekly with at least 24 hours in between sessions.

To get started, hire a [certified personal trainer](#), attend group strength-training classes, visit your library to check out a strength-training DVD and visit the [ACE Exercise Library](#).

I'm not overweight — Do I really need to exercise?

Even if your weight is in a healthy range, regular exercise is key for maintaining good health and to reduce health risks. One study showed that physically fit overweight people had significantly lower health risks than thin, sedentary people. An inactive lifestyle raises your risk for developing serious health conditions, including metabolic syndrome, diabetes, and heart disease.

How can I exercise on a limited budget?

Start walking! All you need is a comfortable pair of walking shoes and a safe place to walk. Community centers typically offer low-cost group fitness classes and libraries lend out fitness DVDs.

Is strength-training a good idea at my age?

Strength-training is critical for older adults. Adults lose 4-6 lbs. of muscle tissue per decade, which means a significant loss of body strength and a lower resting metabolism.

Older adults who undergo a structured strength-training program have shown to regain lost muscle mass, increase their strength, metabolism, bone density and balance and improve their quality of life.

One study linked muscular strength to reduced stiffness in the aorta, the major artery carrying blood from the heart to the rest of the body, which can reduce the risk of death from cardiovascular events, independent of current aerobic fitness levels.

However, if calorie intake isn't also reduced, fat weight increases.

Should I exercise by myself or sign up for a class?

It depends on your needs and preferences. Group fitness classes are great for people who enjoy company or need accountability; others prefer exercising alone.

Just going to the store makes me tired and short of breath. Will exercise help?

It depends. Exercise will strengthen your heart and muscles, regardless of age. You'll be able to do more with less effort and won't tire as easily. Ask your health care provider to give you guidelines for safe and effective exercising.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

[American Senior Fitness Association](#)