

STAYING HEALTHY

Seniors and Exercise: Starting An Exercise Program

Before starting any exercise program, it is important to meet with your doctor for a complete physical exam. Ask your doctor if there are any particular medical problems you have that may affect your fitness program. If you do, work with your doctor to develop a safe exercise program.

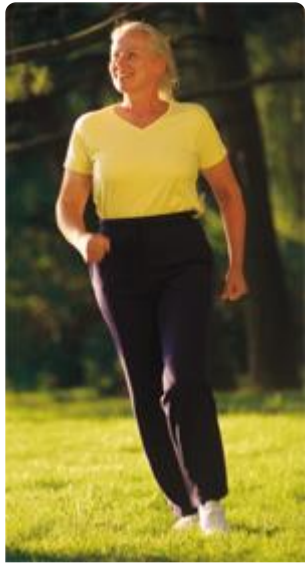
It is important to remember to start slowly. It might have taken you a long time to get out of shape and it will take some time to get back into shape! Take it slowly and don't get discouraged.

Aerobics

There are lots of ways to exercise aerobically. If you are just getting back into exercise, a good place to start is with a walking program. Purchase a pedometer at your local sporting goods store. This device attaches at your waist and tells you how many steps you have taken. Start by seeing how many steps you take in a regular day. Gradually add more steps to your daily activity. Easy ways to increase your steps include:

- parking further away from building doors
- taking the stairs instead of elevators
- walking up escalators

Once you have begun increasing your steps, gradually work toward a goal of 10,000 to 15,000 steps per day. To do this you will need to plan time to walk for exercise. Walking a half mile every other day is a good start. As this becomes easier, try walking every day. When you are ready to increase your distance, be sure not to increase it more than a half mile at a time. This will help prevent overuse syndromes or other injuries.



Brisk walking is a good form of aerobic exercise. Work toward a goal of 10,000 to 15,000 steps per day.

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Wear good shoes for your walks. Make sure they fit comfortably and have a good cushion. It is also important that the shoe's toe box is wide enough for your foot. If you wear an orthotic (arch support), make sure it fits properly and always have it available when trying new shoes.

Replace your shoes every six to nine months, or about every 250 miles. Walking in worn-out shoes may lead to unnecessary pain and injury.

As you progress with your walking program, add variety so it does not become boring. Change where or what time your walk. Find a partner to walk with. Alternate walking one day with a different aerobic activity – such as bicycling – the next. This is called "cross training."

Fitness classes are a great way to add variety to your fitness program. Try yoga, tai chi, low impact aerobics, dancing, or cycling.

Most health clubs will have a pool available for swimming and water exercise. Water exercise is another great way to start an exercise program, especially if you are overweight and/or have joint pain. The water buoys you up and allows you to exercise with less weight and stress on your joints. Many fitness clubs offer water aerobics classes.

If you have joint pain, participating in a water exercise class will allow you to get fit with less stress on your joints.

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Flexibility and Agility

All aerobic activities should be followed by stretching. This will help you gain flexibility and reduce muscle soreness.

Being more flexible also reduces your risk for injury.

Stretching before aerobic activity may also help improve flexibility. Always warm up your muscles before stretching. Five to 10 minutes of lower intensity activity – walking, for example – is a good start. Additional guidelines for stretching include:

- Stretch gently. Relax and breathe during your stretch
- Hold each stretch for about 30 seconds
- Do not bounce
- Do not push a stretch too far; stretching should not be painful

If you have a back or joint condition, talk with your orthopaedic surgeon or physical therapist about a safe, effective stretching program.



Stretching before exercise will help improve flexibility and reduce muscle soreness.

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Strength

Strength training involves working a muscle so that tension develops in the muscle. It is a resistance training program.

Before incorporating strength training into your fitness program, talk with your orthopaedic surgeon, physical therapist, primary care provider, or a fitness professional about effective exercises and proper technique.

You can choose from a wide range of equipment to strength train, such as free weights, rubber bands, weight machines, and even water-filled jugs.

Safe, effective workout programs can be found through organizations such as the AARP, YMCA, YWCA, or your local health and fitness club. Joining a local health club can be very beneficial when you are ready to spend more time on strength training. Many health clubs offer both free weights and exercise machines to help vary your workouts and keep them interesting. Fitness professionals are onsite to provide guidance, and offer classes to teach safe weight training exercises.

Core strengthening – working the muscles of your stomach and back – is important before progressing to other strength activities. It is important to go slow, since it may have been some time since you have used these muscles. Pilates is an exercise program that focuses on core strengthening. Many Pilates exercises can easily be incorporated into your resistance program.

More tips for effective strength training include:

- **Frequency.** Work each muscle group (arms, legs, stomach, back and hips) twice a week. Do not train the same muscle group two days in a row. Always give your muscles a rest from strength training for at least a day.
- **Speed.** Strength exercises are most effective when performed slowly. Move through the motion smoothly – do not jerk or swing the weights.
- **Quantity.** Do 8-12 repetitions of each exercise, working your muscles to fatigue. If you can do 12 repetitions without tiring, increase your weight slightly.

Relaxation

Relaxation helps to lower blood pressure, relieve stress, and improve the immune system.

You can add relaxation to the end of your exercise program or do it at a separate time. Relaxation can be simple. Just sit with your eyes closed and concentrate on controlled deep breathing. Yoga or therapeutic massage are other relaxation techniques to try.

Hydration and Nutrition

As we get older we tend to drink less water. Our bodies need eight 8-ounce glasses of water each day. Caffeinated beverages, such as coffee and tea, do not count toward hydration. They act as a diuretic and remove water from the body.

Drinking 8 glasses of water every day and making healthy food choices will contribute to the success of your fitness program.

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General guidelines for healthy eating include:

- Eat your heavier meals earlier in the day. Try having a good breakfast and lunch with a light evening meal. Eating breakfast suppresses appetite later in the day for most people. Do not eat two hours before bedtime unless otherwise recommended by your doctor.
- Try eating smaller meals with a midday snack and midafternoon snack.
- Consider taking a brisk walk before breakfast. This can "kick start" your metabolism and help to burn more calories throughout the day.
- Increase the fiber in your diet with a goal of 20 to 30 grams a day. Eat more whole grain breads, lean meats, fruits, and vegetables.
- Watch out for processed foods that are high in sodium and sugar.

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