

Exercise for Seniors

Live Better as You Age

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When I was a younger, I never worried about my health or quality of life. As I started working with older personal training clients, I started to get an inkling of what it meant to get older and experience a change of priorities. My senior clients, some of whom were in better shape than I was, taught me about the importance of being healthy and taking care of our bodies for the future. Even more important, they taught me that it's never too late to start exercising and that exercise can make all the difference.

You Can Stop the Clock

Despite all the anti-aging products pushed on us, it's inevitable that we will get older. However, some of the things we lose as we age can actually be prevented, including:

- **Strength:** [Sarcopenia](#) is the fancy term scientists have given to describe loss of muscle, strength and quality of tissue often seen in older adults. Some experts have suggested that muscle mass declines about 1% each year from age 30.
- **Endurance:** As we age, we could lose aerobic fitness and experts believe this often contributes to reduced mobility in daily life.
- **Flexibility:** Joints change with age and this can lead to stiffness, decreased range of motion and more injuries
- **Balance:** Each year, hospitals see thousands of older patients for broken hips due to falling. Balance exercises can help you avoid injuries from falls and keep you independent and mobile.

The good news is that the loss of strength, endurance, flexibility and balance aren't inevitable. The National Institute on Aging believes that, "when older people lose their ability to do things on their own, it doesn't happen just because they have aged. More likely it is because they have become inactive." ([Exercise: A Guide from the National Institute on Aging](#))

It's Never too Late

No matter how old you are, exercise can improve your quality of life and you don't have to spend a lot of time doing it to see and feel improvements. Like everyone else, seniors

need to engage in cardio, strength training and flexibility exercises to stay healthy and maintain as much strength and functionality as possible.

Strength Training for Seniors

Strength training has incredible benefits for everyone, but especially for seniors. Experts believe that "resistance exercise may forestall declines in strength and muscle mass for decades." (Decreased Mobility in the Elderly: The Exercise Antidote)

Before you get started, it's essential to get checked out by your doctor. If you have any conditions such as arthritis, osteoporosis, high blood pressure or heart disease, you'll need to learn the types of exercises you can and can't do. Use the following guidelines to set up your program:

- Lift weights for all muscle groups (chest, back, shoulders, arms, abs and legs) at least 2 non-consecutive days each week
- Start with no weights or light weights to practice the exercises and condition your body. You can use dumbbells, machines and/or resistance bands
- Do each exercise for at least 1 set of 10-15 repetitions.
- Progress by adding more sets (with rest in between) and/or increasing the weights each week
- Focus on having good form for each exercise
- Be sure to warm up with light exercise before lifting weights

If you've never lifted weights before, you may want to work with a personal trainer to learn the proper way to lift. Make sure your trainer has experience in working with seniors, particularly if you have any medical conditions, injuries or joint problems. If personal training isn't an option, you might want to use videos to see proper technique and to get an idea of what a strength training routine looks like. Some options are Strength Training DVDs for Seniors and Chair Exercises for Seniors.

If you've gotten the okay from your doctor and you're ready to get started today, try this **Total Body Workout for Seniors**. The exercises are suggestions ONLY and you should modify the workout according to your fitness level. Please skip any exercises that cause pain or dizziness or that may aggravate any injuries you have.