

Fitness: Benefits of Exercise for Healthy Aging

One of the most beneficial things you can do for your health at any age is exercise. Regular exercise over long periods of time can produce long-term health and aging benefits. A National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES III) shows that greater than half of all adult Americans don't meet even the minimum recommendations for physical activity, with inactivity the most evident in people over the age of 60. And living a sedentary lifestyle is dangerous, leading to illness and premature death in some instances.



Regular, moderate physical activity has been shown to lower the risk of, or improve the symptoms of, many chronic diseases. Exercise helps build muscle and bone strength and improves balance and flexibility — all of which can protect your body from falls that can cause fractures. Scientists from the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, have published a study showing a reduction in fractures in women who do strength training exercises. What is interesting about the study is that the benefits of the strength training exercises showed up in the women many years after the main study stopped.

Exercise can also boost the immune system, helping you fight off illness, control arthritic symptoms like joint swelling and pain, improve mood and self-confidence, and enhance a deeper sleep.

As you grow older, your body changes. The metabolic rate declines by at least 2% per decade after age 30. The metabolism can be stimulated with high-intensity aerobic interval exercise programs to counteract or minimize this decline. In your 40s, you may begin to feel pain and wear and tear on your joints. Now is time for modifying your aerobic exercise program and adding more strength training exercises for women to help maintain joint stability and increase your lean body mass. Instead of running or jogging, try some non-weight-bearing activities like swimming, rowing or cycling. Hormonal changes in your late 40s into the 50s can cause weight gain. It's important to exercise and follow a healthy diet.

Anyone at any age can become active. Keep exercising on a daily basis and you will age healthfully and gracefully. Remember, always warm up and cool down for at least 5 minutes before you begin and end any aerobic exercise program, and be sure to check with your doctor. Here are some ideas of the different types of exercise you should incorporate. These exercises will benefit aging women over 50 and younger.

- ❖ **Aerobic Exercise Program** — walking, dancing, spinning, tennis, swimming
- ❖ **Strength Training Exercises for Women**— use free weights, machines and resistance bands
- ❖ **Stretching** — Pilates, yoga
- ❖ **Tai Chi** — said to improve balance and significantly cut the risk of falls
- ❖ **Stair Climbing** — take the stairs whenever you can

As you become more active, you'll begin to notice other signs that you're getting more fit:

- ❖ You have more energy
- ❖ Your overall mood and outlook on life improves
- ❖ Daily activities become easier to do
- ❖ You can climb the stairs or get out of a car easier
- ❖ You can get up and down from the floor
- ❖ You are sleeping better at night
- ❖ You feel less pain
- ❖ Illness may improve or disappear