

## 10 REASONS TO KEEP FIT AS YOU AGE

"Physical activity has been engineered out of our daily lives," laments David Atkins, M.D., M.P.H., chief medical officer in the Center for Outcomes and Evidence at the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

"We used to rake leaves by hand and walk to the market," Dr. Atkins says. "Now we have leaf blowers and take the car everywhere." So a lot of us don't get the kind of day-to-day physical activity we need.

Cedric Bryant, Ph.D., agrees. Dr. Bryant is chief exercise physiologist for the American Council on Exercise. "Most people plan for financial independence," he says. "But too often, they neglect what they need to be physically independent."

"Physical activity" means any movement of the body that is made by skeletal muscles -- and requires energy to accomplish. "Physical fitness" means the ability of a person to do physical activity. Physical fitness can be measured by determining endurance, power and flexibility.

How physically independent you are, he says, depends on how well you can function physically. That is one of the best reasons to stay physically active -- but it's not the only reason. The American Council on Exercise has put together a list of 10 reasons you should make physical activity a part of your everyday life.

To be safe, talk with your doctor before you start or add to an exercise plan. Even a little bit of exercise will help. "A little activity is better than no activity," Dr. Bryant says.



### **1. It increases bone density and limits osteoporosis.**

Osteoporosis affects 10 million men and women, according to the National Osteoporosis Foundation, while an additional 34 million Americans have low bone mass, putting them at risk for developing osteoporosis. The disease makes your bones weak and brittle. Exercise increases bone strength. The best kinds of exercise to make bones stronger are weight-bearing exercises like walking and resistance exercises such as lifting weights. But you don't need to become a competitive walker or body builder. Just living an active lifestyle will help your bones stay strong. "Do things you enjoy," Dr. Atkins says. "Work in the garden. Walk to the store. Go dancing. Just a little exercise every day ... will make a difference." (You also need vitamin D and calcium for good bone health.)

## **2. It helps you stay independent.**

The point of being active, Dr. Bryant says, is to maintain your ability to function. "As they get older, most people don't care how much oxygen they can inhale or what their percentage of body fat is," he says. "Those things won't motivate. What is important is being able to play with grandchildren, go out with friends and just do the things you have to do."

Studies show, he adds, that people who exercise over their lifetimes can avoid being disabled at the end of their lives. Those who don't exercise, if they live long enough, are sure to experience disability.

## **3. It increases metabolism.**

Metabolism measures how your body handles and uses nutrients. Strength training increases muscle mass, which raises metabolism. One benefit is that your body uses more of the calories you take in because your resting metabolic rate increases. That leads to less body fat and makes it easier to control your weight. Just being a few pounds overweight puts you at high risk for many health problems. "Physical activity lowers that risk," Dr. Atkins says.

## **4. It reduces your risk for falls.**

There are two reasons for this. The first is that exercise lets you practice keeping your balance and reacting to things around you. The second is that exercise can help arrest a natural decline in muscle fitness. "Of all the various benefits from exercise," Dr. Bryant says, "the most important for seniors is muscular fitness. Things people take for granted when they are younger all require a certain level of muscle strength. That includes just getting up out of a chair or walking fast enough to get across the street before the light changes." Exercise will keep your muscles fit.

## **5. It makes you more flexible.**

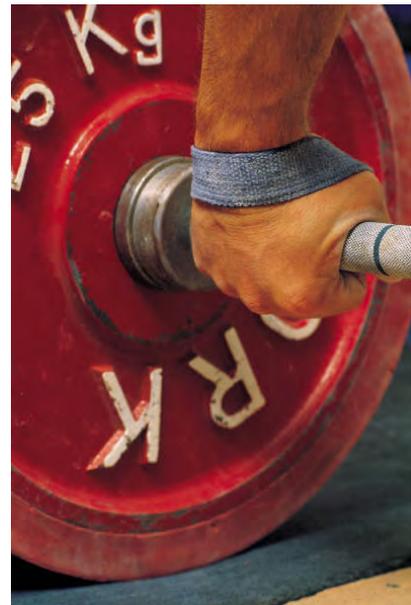
Doing things that put your body through the full range of movement helps keep it flexible. Dr. Bryant says these activities don't need to be structured. "Any kind of activity is going to produce results," he says. Dr. Atkins adds: "The ideal is to work exercise into what you do. Walk instead of drive. Rake instead of using a blower. If you take up some overly hard routine, you won't stick with it." It's important to maintain your fitness efforts, he says.

## **6. It's a reason to be sociable.**

Exercise groups are a good way to meet people. Since one of the best strategies for increasing your activity is to do it in a group, Dr. Atkins says, exercise can lead to meeting new friends. Check at the community center or local health club for special exercise groups for seniors. You can also ask your friends to join you.

## **7. It improves your mood.**

Exercise is good for your mind. Studies show it reduces depression. It can also lift your



self-esteem. "People's mental and social well-being is closely related to their physical well-being," Dr. Bryant says. "When you are physically active you improve your sense of what you can do."

### **8, 9 and 10. It helps your entire body.**

It improves the way your lungs work, helps prevent and control diabetes and is good for your heart. "There is not a single system in the body that is not positively affected by exercise," Dr. Bryant says. All of the body's systems deteriorate with age. "We used to think that was a function of aging," he says. "But as much as 50 percent of it can be attributed to a lack of physical activity. Exercise will alter that. It will slow the breakdown. In some cases it can even reverse it." Being active will help you live well.

## **FOUR TYPES OF EXERCISE**

These four types of exercise are the most important, according to the National Institute on Aging:

- a. **Endurance.** These exercises boost heart rate and breathing over a period of time. They are good for the heart, lungs and circulation. They also help prevent or delay some diseases. Examples are: walking, running, biking, swimming, dancing or any other activity done without stopping for a period of time.
- b. **Strength training.** Some examples are: weight training or body weight exercises such as push ups or pull ups. Lifting weights make older adults strong enough to do what they need to do -- and like to do.
- c. **Balance.** These exercises help prevent falls, a major cause of disability in older adults. Try practicing balancing on one foot trying to increase the length of time one is able to do it over time and then adding some movement of the eyes or hands to make it more difficult.
- d. **Stretching.** Some examples are: flexibility exercises, yoga, tai chi, pilates, anything that makes one try to increase the range of motion of a joint. These exercises help keep the body limber and flexible.



## **A WINNING PROGRAM**

These tips can help you be successful at exercise:

- Schedule your exercise time just as you do other activities. It should be a normal part of your day.
- Start out slow and increase your pace gradually.
- Persuade a friend to exercise with you. A friend can provide the motivation to stick with a program because you know the person is counting on you to be there.
- To prevent boredom, vary what you do for exercise.

- Add physical activity to your day-to-day activities, such as using the stairs instead of the elevator and parking farther from your destination to get a longer walk in.

## HELPFUL RESOURCES & WEBSITES

For more tips and resources on ways to welcome the new year with a renewed commitment to healthy living, check out the resources listed below:

- [Myfitnesspal](#) is a health and fitness online community with easy to use tools to track your nutritional intake and exercise levels. Join their [Facebook page](#) for much needed motivation and support, or download their free mobile app to track your nutritional intake and exercise levels.
- Need some ideas on stretches to do at your desk? Incorporate [these](#) stretches into your workday for a fresh start in 2013.
- [Commitment is the New Resolution](#)
- [Top 10 Healthiest New Year's Resolutions](#)
- [5 financial planning steps to a healthier new year](#)



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