

Fitness for Seniors



The Importance of Staying Fit

As we age, we may adopt a more sedentary lifestyle. For seniors, it is crucial to remain active and promote lifesaving benefits. Regular exercise is good for more than just maintaining a healthy weight – it also enhances moods, memory and brain function.

If you have decided that today is the day to get in shape, it is important to schedule an appointment with your general doctor to determine the level of activity your body can handle. As a senior, you will want to ensure any exercise program will be beneficial and not irritate existing medical conditions.

There is a fine line between a quality workout and strenuous routines which may do your harm.

Here are some tips and guidelines from the National Library of Medicine to help you as you get started on the road to fitness.

AMAZING BENEFITS

Once you get used to exercising, expect a sense of pride and accomplishment as you exceed goals and enhance your health. These are a few ways that working on your fitness will boost your everyday life.

- **Weight control.** In addition to a quality diet, exercise plays an important role to control your weight and avoid obesity.

- **Heart risk is reduced.** The increased blood flow your body experiences during a workout raises your oxygen levels. This is a way to combat risks associated with heart diseases like high cholesterol,



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- coronary artery problems and heart attacks.

- **Manage insulin levels.** Physical activity lowers blood-sugar levels while promoting the efficiency of insulin, making it a great weapon in preventing or managing diabetes.

GETTING STARTED

Creating a workout plan can be an overwhelming experience, sometimes it is best left in the hands of an expert who understands your current health conditions. Those who are typically inactive should start slower than

someone who has committed to a life of fitness.

When you jump in to a routine that is more than you can handle, it is easy to become burned out or discouraged that the work is too hard. Start at a pace that works for you and enjoy the results.

FIND THE TIME

During the hustle of our busy lives, it can be sometimes difficult to squeeze in the time for an efficient workout. It's important to make the time by waking up earlier than normal or squeezing in exercises between errands.

Counting Steps

To enhance your cardiovascular system through exercise, workouts don't need to be rigorous. In fact, the American Heart Association suggests at least 150 minutes per week of moderate exercise is important to prevent heart disease and stroke.

An easy way to achieve this number is by taking regular walks; a step counter is an efficient tool to help you monitor progress and set goals to exceed in the future.

No matter your age, sometimes the hardest part of getting active is finding the motivation.

FINDING THE RIGHT HELP

Today's market is full of gadgets to help you on the route of getting healthy. A simple pedometer is efficient in keeping track of the total steps you make throughout the day but there are more advanced tools that can reveal even more about your daily habits. Here are some things to look for when choosing an electronic exercise partner.

- **Calorie tracker:** Logging the number of calories you ingest during the day gives you a good perspective on how many steps or other activities you must complete to remain on the right track.

- **Stopwatch:** Incorporating different paces on your walks can help increase the number of calories you burn and the rate at which your heart beats. Try to use the stopwatch to time yourself at quicker paces while gaining steps.

SET GOALS

After a few days with your



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counter, you will get an idea of how many steps you take on average throughout the day. Try to set goals for yourself and increase the number as you feel comfortable.

You don't need to change your lifestyle or go too far out of your way to obtain more exercise. A few good ways to squeeze in the extra steps is by parking farther away from the

grocery store or making extra laps around buildings you frequent.

WALKING SAFETY

If you will be performing

your walking exercise when the sun is down, take care. Make sure to wear highly reflective clothing or even equip yourself with wireless LED lights to make yourself easily visible.

Focus on Flexibility

Many people think of stretching as a warmup for a rigorous workout. Especially for older adults, stretching should be considered its own part of an exercise regimen. With age, muscles and joints often weaken, leaving seniors with a limited range of movement. Proper stretching will promote flexibility and offer a wide range of health benefits.

According to a report from the Journal of Physiology, regular muscle stretching, when performed five times per week for four weeks, increases blood flow to muscles of the lower leg. If you're unsure where to start when incorporating a stretching workout into your exercise plans, these beneficial motions suggested by the Silver Sneakers will promote better health and improve levels of comfort.

HAMSTRING STRETCHING

Hamstrings can become irritated during most exercises, especially during walks or moderate jogs. Stretching this part of your body is an effective way to ensure you won't feel discomfort.

To obtain a perfect stretch, sit sideways on a bench or flat surface. While keeping your back straight and one foot on the floor, extend your other leg on the bench with your toes pointed upward. Once you feel your muscles stretch, hold the position for 10 to 30 seconds, then alternate each leg.

ARMS, CHEST AND SHOULDERS

A good way to stretch each of these body parts is to stand farther than an arm's length while facing a wall with your feet apart. Keep your back straight and slowly walk your hands up the walls until they



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are comfortably above your head. You should hold them overhead for 10 to 30 seconds before making the descent downward.

BACK

Stretching your back is a good way to avoid unnecessary strain and maintain comfort. An effective method is to

sit toward the front of a chair with your feet flat on the floor. Keep your back straight and bend forward from your hips. Next, slide your hands down

your legs and hold for 10 to 30 seconds at your shins. Make sure to straighten yourself up slowly once the interval is complete.

The image that pop culture paints of yoga can be enough to frighten seniors into completely avoiding it.

Envisioning yourself twisting and holding seemingly impossible positions has likely made you think it is a program for younger people in peak physical condition. However, like most exercise plans, there are different classes based on experience and functionality. The benefits are too great to miss out on.

Studies have shown serious advantages when senior citizens commit to bringing yoga and meditation in to their lives. Here are some of the benefits reported by the American Association of Retired Persons for those in different stages of life.

50s

One of the biggest advantages that seniors gain from yoga is the reduction of stress and hypertension, oftentimes eliminating the need for medication. Significant drops in blood pressure levels are often reported because of the three main elements performed in the exercise: postures, meditation and breathing.

Osteoporosis is a disease that weakens bones to the point they break easily. It often goes unnoticed until a breakage occurs, making recovery difficult. According to the National Institute on Aging, the situation heightens as people enter their 40s or 50s because more bone tissue is broken down than replaced.

Maintaining a healthy waistline is crucial as we get older, as obesity can create serious illnesses like diabetes or heart disease. Yoga is a great weapon in the remaining fit and at a healthy weight.

60s

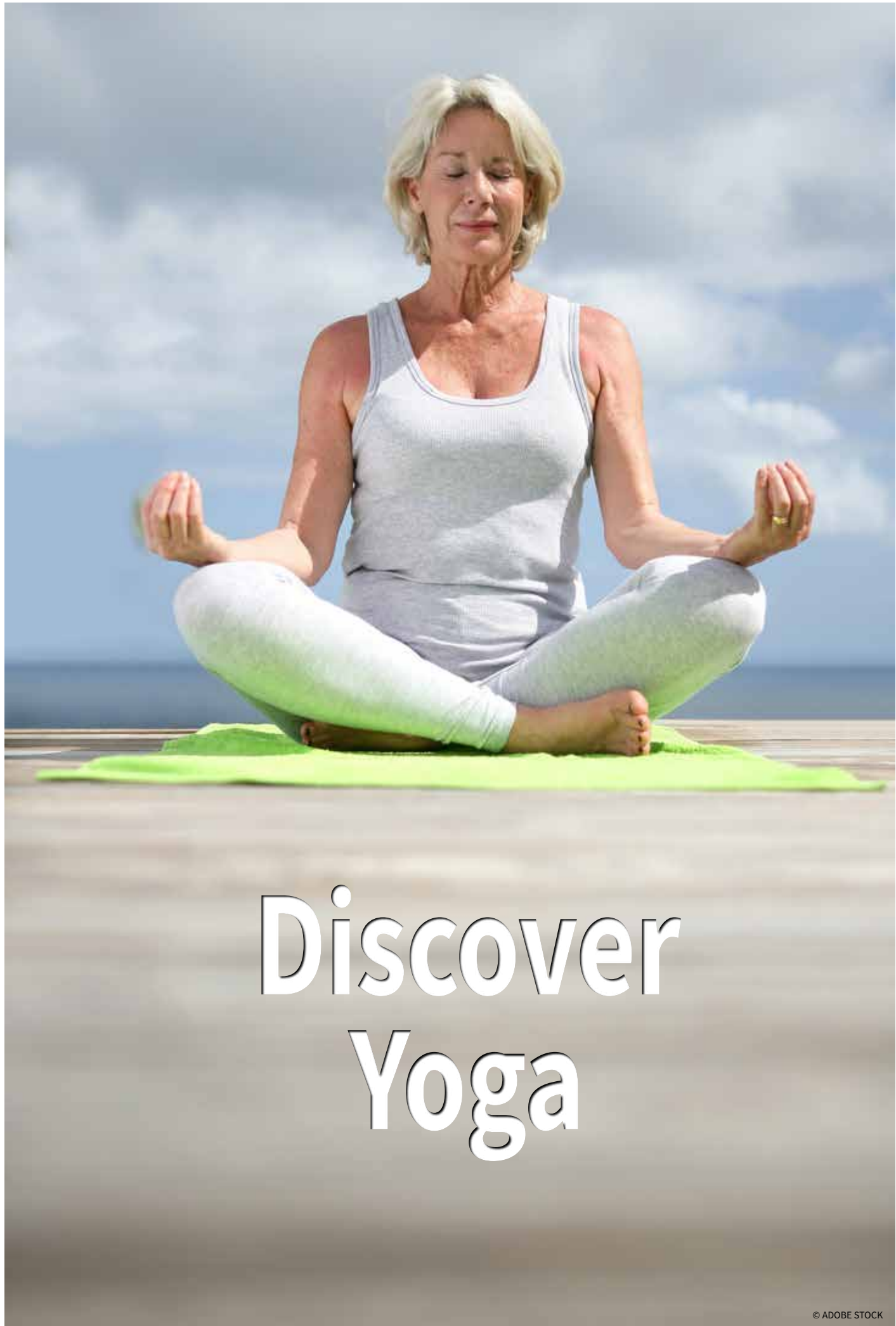
Stress can do serious harm by causing hearts to beat faster and muscles to tense or strain, leaving seniors feeling uncomfortable. Participating in yoga can alleviate levels of anxiety and regulate your heart rate to a comfortable range.

Protecting your joints is also important as we age since disorders like carpal tunnel and arthritis are commonly experienced. Ensuring that these joints are exercised regularly helps maintain your independence by giving you the ability to perform daily activities as get older.

Actions as simple as getting dressed or brushing your teeth can be excruciating when performed with a debilitating disease.

70s

As we get older, our balance is greatly compromised. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report each year that three million older people are treated in emergency departments for fall injuries. Learning proper yoga techniques which promote standing and balance help build strength to catch yourself from falling.



Strength Training

For older adults, building strength and muscles is an efficient way to reduce levels of pain and limit or manage chronic diseases. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, with regular aerobic exercise, strength training has even been associated with boosting mental and emotional health.

Heart health is important at any age, the CDC reports heart disease claims the lives of about 610,000 Americans, annually. Increasing your strength helps enhance the cardiovascular system by creating healthy heart tissue.

BENEFITS

Building strength doesn't have to be about training for bodybuilding competitions or achieving the perfect six pack. For most seniors, the biggest benefits to gain is being strong enough to take care of themselves as the inevitability of age begins slowing them down.

The American College of Sports Medicine encourages those over 50 to participate in weight training and even say people in their 90s can see great results. Here are some of the ways building strength benefits everyone who practices it safely.

- Improves walking ability – As bones begin weakening and joints tighten, everyday activities can become a hassle. Weight training can influence endurance and make it less painful for seniors to walk.

- Strengthen bones – The CDC reports one out of five falls causes serious injury like broken bones. Weightlifting not only boosts strength, balance and agility, it can help build bone mass to lessen the impact in case of a fall.

- Arthritis relief – Improving the condition of muscles, tendons and ligaments surrounding your joints will enhance your range of motion while alleviating pain caused from diseases like arthritis.



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GETTING STARTED

A good way to become accustomed to what your body can handle in strength training is by skipping the gym or expensive equipment and experi-

ment with your own body weight. Learning the proper form for exercises like pushups, lunges and squats will make it easier to transition to a setting in a facility later.

If you are just getting into this type of training, keep the initial exercises short to discover how you feel afterward. It won't take long before you know how to adjust and make it more enjoyable.

Eating for Fitness

Physical fitness and diet go hand in hand when promoting a healthy lifestyle. Eating the right foods while you're committed to a workout plan will provide you with more energy to achieve your goals. Sometimes, small tweaks in what you consume can have big advantages to the way you perform.

Those on special diets or who are unfamiliar with how certain foods can cause changes in the body should consult with a professional.

MIX IT UP

Eating healthy doesn't always mean chomping on lettuce or barely consuming enough to feel satisfied. There are many delicious ways to eat beneficial foods, here are few suggestions from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics to keep yourself from feeling bored while ingesting healthy options.

- Explore different sources of protein, foods like fish, chicken, peas and beans are packed with the important nutrient.
- Incorporate more fruits and vegetables into your daily life. If you feel hungry between meals, these vitamin-rich options can hold you over.
- Three servings of low-fat or fat-free dairy which is fortified with vitamin D promotes bone health.

IMPORTANCE OF PROTEIN

Protein is a nutrient responsible for how muscles recover from workouts, remain strong and maintain balance and mobility older adults need to remain independent.

A 2016 study by the University of Arkansas' Food

Science and Geriatrics, shows higher levels of protein consumption can overcome symptoms of sarcopenia. This ailment is known as the loss of muscle mass, strength and function. The report also found that protein levels in the

range of 30 to 35 percent of total caloric intake is beneficial. The nutrient is also a key player in absorbing other vitamins and contributing to lower blood pressure and cholesterol, boosting concentrating and providing higher ener-

gy levels.

Eating a diet rich in protein is extremely important for those with an active lifestyle.

REWARD YOURSELF

It's easy to get wrapped up in eating healthy and exercis-

ing so much that you forget to reward yourself for small victories. Consuming a favorite snack that doesn't always make sense to a healthy diet is a way to avoid being discouraged and push yourself to exceed the next goal.



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Exercising Safely

The road to fitness is a rewarding journey but must be traveled with extreme caution, especially as we age. If you're not accustomed to an active lifestyle, it is a good idea to start slow and with the green light from your general practitioner.

If you think you have a better chance of sticking to a workout plan at a facility rather than at home, there are a few things to consider. Is the gym friendly toward an older crowd or is the atmosphere a place you want to avoid? Plan to visit a few different places before deciding on where to begin your membership.

The American Association of Retired Persons and the International Council on Active Aging worked together to develop a program to find age-friendly facilities in your local community. Use the ICAA's online directory to narrow down your choices. It won't be long until you find a comfortable setting in a place you can succeed.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

As an older person, a conversation with your doctor regarding a potential workout regimen is a must. Here are a few questions you should consider asking, as suggested by the American Academy of Family Physicians.

- Are there any activities I should avoid?
 - Will my health conditions affect my ability to exercise?
 - Which exercises will be most beneficial and am I up to date on preventative care?
- Once you conclude on which types of activities will



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make the biggest impact on promoting health, scheduling time with a personal trainer is a great way to create a plan.

SAFETY TIPS

It's important to dress for the weather before you begin a workout. If you will be out-

doors, keep an eye on the forecast and plan accordingly. When exercising in colder temperatures, dress in layers so you can adjust your wardrobe if you begin overheating. If you are exercising outdoors in the heat, be sure to drink plenty of water.

You will also want to pay attention to the shoes you wear. Make sure they have an effective arch support and a padded heel to avoid discomfort in your feet. Check a local footwear store for shoes that are built for exercise or running.

If you are unaccustomed to being active, start slowly at first. Don't be discouraged if you don't see the results you desire immediately. Getting in shape is a long road, but once the benefits begin appearing, the hard work is more enjoyable.