

Fitness for Seniors





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The Mental Effects of Exercise

Many people associate physical benefits with regular exercise.

After all, staying active can improve strength and physical function, while activities that focus on balance can help reduce the risk of falls. Regular physical activity can boost cardiovascular health and reduce the risk of several chronic diseases. But its benefits aren't limited to the body. Exercise can reduce stress and feelings of anxiety and depression while improving mood and overall emotional well-being. Here's how:

BIG MENTAL BENEFITS

Many people think of exercise primarily in terms of its physical benefits, but staying active can support mental and emotional health. A walk, workout or yoga session can provide a break from daily worries, while setting and reaching fitness goals may offer a sense of accomplishment and greater confidence. Making physical activity part of a regular routine can also add structure to the day.

Exercise has been shown to reduce stress, anxiety and depression, and it may improve sleep and energy levels. Activities done with other people, such as walking groups or exercise classes, can provide another benefit: opportunities for social connection.

GETTING STARTED

Exercise does not have to be strenuous to provide mental-health benefits. Starting with an activity that feels manageable can make it easier to build a routine and create a sense of accomplishment. Walking, stretching, swimming or other enjoyable activities can provide a change of scenery, a break from daily concerns and an opportunity to focus on the present.

People who have health conditions, injuries or concerns about exercising safely may want to talk with a health-care professional before significantly changing their activity level. Start gradually and choose realistic goals that can be adjusted as your fitness and confidence grow.

MAKING IT LAST

Enjoyment and social connection can make physical activity easier to maintain. Walking with a friend, joining an exercise class or participating in a group activity can combine movement with opportunities to socialize, which can provide additional benefits for emotional well-being.

There is also no reason to stick with an activity you dislike. Trying different forms of exercise can help you find something that fits your abilities, interests and budget. Walking, free online exercise programs and activities offered through community or senior centers can provide inexpensive ways to stay active.

Keep Moving While You Travel

Travel can disrupt familiar routines, including regular exercise. But staying active while away from home doesn't necessarily mean finding a gym or recreating your usual workout.

Walking while sightseeing, exploring a park or taking an active tour can all help you keep moving while enjoying your destination.

WHY IT MATTERS

Regular physical activity provides important benefits throughout life. For older adults, it can improve sleep, reduce anxiety and blood pressure, support bone and cardiovascular health, reduce the risk of falls and help preserve the physical function needed to live independently.

Trips can involve long periods of sitting, particularly when traveling by plane, train or car. Breaking up those sedentary periods provides another reason to incorporate movement into your travel plans.

KEEP MOVING IN TRANSIT

Before a flight, take advantage of time in the terminal to walk rather than remaining seated at the gate. On longer



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flights, stand and walk periodically when conditions allow. While seated, simple movements such as raising and lowering your heels and toes or tightening and releasing your leg muscles can keep your legs moving.

On road trips, schedule regular stops to get out of the vehicle, walk and stretch. Travelers who have additional risk factors for blood clots should

talk with a healthcare professional about any precautions they may need.

MAKE YOUR DESTINATION ACTIVE

Once you arrive, look for enjoyable ways to make movement part of the trip. Parks, walking trails, museums, walking tours, swimming and other recreational activities can add physical activity without mak-

ing your vacation feel like a workout.

If you want more structured exercise, check whether your hotel has a fitness room or look for local classes. Bodyweight exercises or an online workout can also provide options that require little or no equipment.

ADAPT YOUR ROUTINE

You don't have to maintain exactly the same exercise rou-

tine you follow at home. Focus instead on remaining active in ways that suit your abilities, destination and schedule.

Weather and surroundings matter too. Hot, humid, cold or unfamiliar environments may require changes in the duration or intensity of activity. Stay hydrated, wear appropriate footwear and clothing, and pay attention to how your body responds.

Creative Ways to Boost Health

Gym memberships, fitness classes and exercise equipment can add up, but staying active doesn't have to strain your budget.

Walking, home workouts and community programs can provide inexpensive ways to build strength, improve balance and support overall health.

FREE OR LOW-COST OPTIONS

Start by checking programs in your community. Senior centers, recreation departments, parks, faith communities and nonprofit organizations may offer free or low-cost exercise classes, walking groups and other activities for older adults. Public libraries may provide exercise videos, equipment or information about local programs.

Some Medicare Advantage and Medicare Supplement plans include fitness benefits at no additional cost. Programs such as SilverSneakers and Renew Active may provide eligible members with access to participating fitness centers, classes and online workouts. Benefits vary by plan and location, so check with your insurer to see what's available.

WORKING OUT AT HOME

Home exercise can be an



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other inexpensive option, particularly for people with limited transportation or when weather makes outdoor activity difficult. Online videos and streaming programs offer routines ranging from low-impact aerobics to strength, balance and flexibility exercises.

Many activities require little or no equipment. Walking or

dancing can provide aerobic activity, while wall pushups and other body-weight exercises can help strengthen muscles.

Resistance bands, light hand weights or household items can add resistance to some exercises. A sturdy chair can provide support for certain movements.

Choose activities appro-

priate for your abilities and increase activity gradually.

USING TECHNOLOGY

Free and low-cost digital resources can make it easier to exercise at home. Health plans, community organizations and fitness programs may offer live or on-demand classes, while apps can help users find workouts, schedule

activity or track progress.

When choosing an online workout, look for programs appropriate to your fitness and mobility level and instructors who demonstrate modifications when needed. The goal isn't to follow the trendiest routine. It's to find safe, affordable activities you'll actually want to keep doing.

Make Group Activities Accessible

Gyms, exercise classes and other group activities can provide opportunities to stay active while connecting with other people. But joining an unfamiliar class or entering a gym for the first time can feel daunting at any age.

Learning what to expect and choosing an activity that fits your needs can make getting started easier.

DO SOME RESEARCH

Before signing up, think about the kinds of activities you enjoy and what you hope to gain from them. Options may include low-impact aerobic exercise, strength training, balance work and activities that support flexibility and range of motion.

Look for classes designed for your experience and fitness level, and ask whether instructors offer modifications for people with different mobility, balance or physical needs. If you have a chronic condition, injury, symptoms or concerns about exercising safely, talk with a healthcare professional about what kinds of activity may be appropriate.

Start gradually. Choosing an activity that matches your current abilities and increas-



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ing the challenge over time can help you build confidence while reducing the risk of injury.

GET TO KNOW THE SPACE

Consider visiting a gym or community center before your first workout or class. Ask for a tour and find out where equipment, locker rooms and

other facilities are located. Knowing what to expect can make an unfamiliar setting feel more comfortable.

Talk with instructors about the class format and whether it is appropriate for beginners. You might also ask whether exercises can be adapted, whether chairs or other supports are available and what equipment you'll need.

MAKE THE FIRST VISITS EASIER

If crowds make you uncomfortable, ask staff which times or classes tend to be quieter. Smaller groups may make it easier to learn new movements and become familiar with the surroundings.

You may also want to attend with a friend or family member. Having a familiar person

along can provide company and encouragement while you settle into a new routine.

Most important, give yourself permission to try something else if a class, instructor or environment isn't a good fit. The goal is not to force yourself to enjoy a particular workout. It's to find a form of movement that feels safe, welcoming and sustainable.

Exercising with Arthritis

More than 1 in 5 U.S. adults live with diagnosed arthritis.

Regular exercise can be challenging when joint pain or stiffness makes movement uncomfortable. But physical activity can play an important role in managing arthritis. It can help reduce pain, improve physical function and support overall health and quality of life.

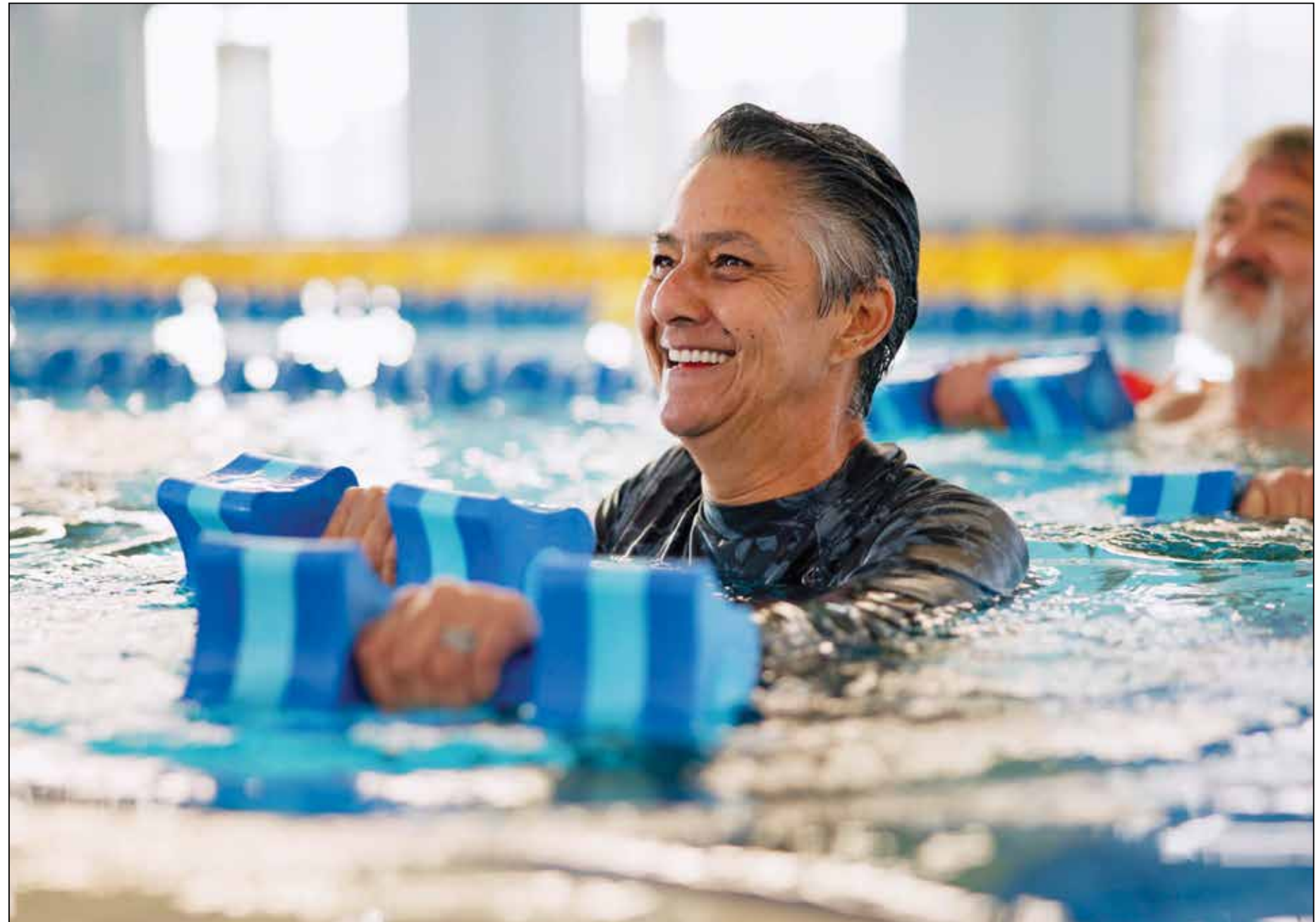
WHAT IS ARTHRITIS?

Arthritis isn't a single disease. The term encompasses more than 100 conditions that can affect joints and surrounding tissues. Common symptoms include pain, stiffness, swelling and reduced range of motion.

Osteoarthritis is the most common type. Other forms include rheumatoid arthritis, gout and lupus. Some inflammatory forms of arthritis are autoimmune diseases, in which the immune system mistakenly attacks healthy tissue. Certain medications used to treat these conditions may suppress parts of the immune system and increase the risk of infection.

MAKING THE DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosing arthritis typically begins with a medical history and physical examination. Depending on a person's symptoms and the type of arthritis suspected, a healthcare professional may order blood



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tests, imaging or other tests.

Because treatment differs among types of arthritis, an accurate diagnosis is important. Early diagnosis and treatment can be particularly important for inflammatory forms of arthritis that can cause lasting joint damage.

HOW TO STAY ACTIVE

People with arthritis can

benefit from regular physical activity. Joint-friendly options include walking, cycling, swimming, water exercise, dancing and tai chi. Strengthening exercises can help, provided they do not cause or worsen joint pain.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recognizes several evidence-based programs designed to help

people with arthritis exercise safely and manage symptoms. These include Fit & Strong!, Active Living Every Day, the Arthritis Foundation Aquatic Program and Walk With Ease.

Start gradually and choose activities that fit your abilities and symptoms. Some temporary soreness or stiffness can occur when beginning a new activity, but persistent or

severe pain deserves medical attention.

Talk with a healthcare professional or physical therapist if you're unsure which activities are appropriate for you. Contact a healthcare professional if exercise causes sharp or constant pain, makes you limp, produces significant or persistent swelling, or leaves a joint unusually warm or red.

Pickleball Draws All Ages

Pickleball began as a backyard game on Bainbridge Island, Wash., in 1965. Six decades later, it has become one of the country's most popular recreational sports.

More than 24 million Americans played pickleball in 2025, according to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association. That's a growth from 4.2 million in 2020.

Pickleball was once closely associated with older players, but its popularity now spans generations. For older adults looking for an active and social pastime, it offers an appealing way to get moving.

WHAT IS IT?

Pickleball combines elements of tennis, badminton and table tennis. It is played indoors or outdoors on a badminton-sized court with a net slightly lower than a tennis net. Players use solid paddles to hit a perforated plastic ball.

Games may be played as singles or doubles. Most games are played to 11 points, with the winner leading by at least two.

After the serve, the receiving team must let the ball bounce before returning it. The serving team must then also let the return bounce be-



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fore hitting it. After those first two bounces, players may hit the ball before or after it bounces.

A 7-foot non-volley zone on either side of the net, commonly known as the kitchen, prevents players from volleying while standing close to the net.

The basic rules can be learned fairly quickly, al-

though strategy and technique develop with experience.

THE FITNESS BENEFITS

Pickleball combines physical activity with competition and social interaction. Playing can provide aerobic exercise while challenging coordination, balance and agility. Doubles play gives participants an opportunity

to exercise with other people and build social connections.

The sport's smaller court may make it approachable for some players, but pickleball still requires quick changes of direction, stopping and starting.

As with any new activity, players should begin gradually and wear footwear appropriate for court sports.

People with joint, balance, cardiovascular or other health concerns may want to talk with a healthcare professional about whether pickleball is appropriate for them.

Most important, choose a pace and level of play that fits your abilities. Pickleball can range from a relaxed recreational game to a fast and demanding competitive sport.

Reasons to Keep Going

Knowing that exercise is good for you doesn't necessarily make it easy to get moving.

Motivation can fade when you're tired, busy, bored, uncomfortable or unsure where to begin.

Instead of waiting until you feel enthusiastic about exercising, look for ways to make physical activity easier to start and easier to repeat.

FIGURE OUT WHAT'S GETTING IN THE WAY

The National Institute on Aging recommends identifying the barriers that make it difficult to stay active and finding strategies that address those particular challenges. If exercise feels boring, try an activity you genuinely enjoy or pair movement with something you already like, such as listening to music or walking with a friend.

If you're short on time, try shorter periods of activity. If cost, transportation, pain or concerns about falling are keeping you inactive, look for options that address those specific obstacles.

There is no single form of exercise that works for everyone. Walking, gardening, dancing, swimming and recreational activities can all provide opportunities to move.

START WITH A SMALL GOAL

The NIA recommends setting specific, realistic goals rather than simply resolving to "exercise more." A manageable goal might be taking a 10-minute walk three times this week or doing a short strength routine twice.

Keep track of what you do and notice your progress. Reaching small goals can build confidence and make the next step feel more manageable. The



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NIA suggests tracking activity as one way to stay motivated and recognize improvement over time.

MAKE IT SOCIAL, IF THAT HELPS

Social support can make it easier to remain active. The NIA suggests exercising with friends or family members or joining a group when companionship and encouragement help with motivation.

Invite someone to walk, swim, attend a class or take part in another

activity you both enjoy. Group activities can provide opportunities for conversation and social connection. If you prefer exercising alone, however, don't assume you need a workout partner to succeed.

BUILD ACTIVITY INTO YOUR LIFE

You do not have to exercise every day or follow exactly the same schedule to benefit from physical activity. Look instead for ways to make movement a regular part of the week.

That might mean scheduling a walk after lunch, attending the same class each Tuesday or gardening on weekends. Short periods of activity also count, so a busy day does not have to become a completely inactive one.

The NIA advises people not to be discouraged when illness, travel or other interruptions disrupt an exercise routine. Missing several days or weeks doesn't mean you've failed. Begin again at a manageable level and gradually rebuild your routine.