

# The Benefits of Exercise as a Senior

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For many senior citizens, the thought of beginning a new exercise regimen can seem daunting. You may feel tired, depressed – or anxious about moving your body when your mobility could have been compromised over the years.

But what you need to understand is that exercise has the ability to eliminate those issues – *all* of them! In the very beginning, it might wear you out a bit, but that's only because people tend to overdo it.

Take it slow and merge into more movement and your energy levels will soar, not diminish. As for depression, well exercise is known to release feel good hormones known as endorphins.

You'll start to feel better, and the chance to exercise could mean enhancing your social activity (if you want it to). Then there's anxiety about mobility. You don't want to start off doing back handstands, but you moving around more and strengthening the core of your body will help, not hurt, your mobility.

Let's look at some more of the main benefits of exercise as a senior, and get a little more in depth about them so that you can embrace the idea of developing a fitness routine in your golden years.

## **Exercise Reverses Many Diseases**

While nutrition plays a major role in disease prevention and treatment, moving and strengthening your body does, too. You can feed your fitness levels and literally reverse the damage that diabetes causes, help your cells attack cancer, and more.

Heart disease is one of the top killers of both men and women, and when you exercise – regardless of what age you start – you begin strengthening your heart and giving it the power it needs to keep you healthy.

The movement you put into during an exercise routine floods your body with oxygen that otherwise may not get circulated. This helps on a cellular level, and enables your immune system and other internal systems to perform at a higher ability.

There are some of you reading this who suffer from things like asthma, and you worry about getting involved in an exercise regimen because you already have trouble breathing.

But did you know that exercise can help curb the frequency and severity of an asthma attack? You just have to slowly push your body out of its comfort zone and help it build a tolerance without overdoing it all at once.

### **Exercise Restores Your Youthful Appearance**

When it comes to aging, the majority of the population initially concerns themselves with looks. Before you're even *thinking* about mobility, you're more concerned with fine lines around your eyes, hair thinning out, and sagging skin.

Exercise is a head-to-toe solution that can turn back the clock to some degree and help you achieve a youthful glow. It can strengthen your skin and improve your outlook on how *you* look!

Exercise helps your skin flush out toxins, and when toxins are released, your skin gets more oxygen and has a rosy glow to it. You have to work up a sweat, using cardio or other measures to release toxins.

Did you know there are specific facial exercises you can do to prevent and reverse wrinkles? They're called yoga facial exercises, and you can do these easily once a day and help the circulation and boost collagen production to tighten up your skin.

### **Exercise Gets You Out of the House and Keeps You Independent**

There are two issues that exercise as a senior address wonderfully – one is getting you active in society, and the other is allowing you to maintain a sense of independence. Many elderly citizens begin to rely on others to come to them more and more often.

This keeps you a prisoner in your own home, and it isn't beneficial to anyone. You can do so many things when you choose to exercise out of your home. You can join a gym and attend senior exercise classes and make new friends.

There are local mall walking clubs dedicated to senior citizens. Look online for those, or have someone find one for you. Test it out and see if you enjoy the company of the others in the group.

Many times, these fitness excursions will lead to solid friendships where you're doing more than just exercise – you're attending plays, visiting museums, going for lunch afterwards, and more.

The independent lifestyle you gain from implementing an exercise regimen is very valuable. You don't want to have to rely on your kids or friends to take care of you, and by using exercise to strengthen your body, you won't have to.

Focus on both cardio and strength training for a total body approach to fitness. The cardio will increase your stamina in terms of your ability to maintain an active lifestyle without tiring out.

The strength training helps you prevent falls and move around with more agility. If you suffer from a condition that affects your mobility, such as painful arthritis, then you'll be pleased to know that the more you exercise as a senior, the better your arthritis becomes!

Back pain is another issue that often plagues older adults. Many people just suffer through it, not wanting to move an inch for fear of experiencing more pain. But did you know that the right kinds of movements will alleviate back pain issues?

Again, core exercises help prevent back pain, so if nothing else, start with a program that's built to help strengthen your core. Then you can add things that allow for more mobility later.

If you have a mobility issue such as a knee or joint that's aching, then you can work on strengthening the muscles around your knee. This will allow you to put more of an impact on your leg over time, helping you get going longer – and farther.

## **Exercise Helps You Sleep Better**

Sleep issues are common as we age. We need less sleep, but for some, the amount of sleep they get is inadequate and you end up fatigued, suffering from brain fog, and in many chronic cases, depressed.

Some people mistakenly believe they have to exercise to the point of exhaustion for fitness to affect sleep. That's not true. As little as twenty minutes a day can help you sleep better every night.

You don't want to exercise right before bed, as some people say. That will actually have the opposite effect. Instead, you want to exercise earlier in the day so that by the time you're ready for bed, your body is in a relaxed state – not one where your heart rate is up.

No longer will you lie in bed wondering when you'll fall asleep. Exercise helps you fall asleep faster. And did you know that moderate exercise worked better in studies than vigorous exercise when it came to improving sleep?

You'll be able to stay asleep after falling asleep when you start adding exercise to your daily life. Waking during the night makes it hard for seniors to get any sort of quality slumber.

You may even sleep a little longer. Instead of 5-6 hours total, you might be able to get a full 7-8 hours of sleep, which will help with so many issues – eliminating fatigue, alleviating irritability, and more.

## **Exercise Improves Your Memory**

We all worry about dementia as we age. Did we just forget our keys, or is a sign of something more sinister, like Alzheimer's? No one wants to think that someday, their memories could be erased.

Exercise helps clear out brain fog and keeps your brain tuned up. When you exercise, it literally increases the size of your hippocampus. This is the area of the brain where your verbal and memory learning reside.

The best fitness for brain clarity is cardiovascular. You need to get it to the point where you've worked up a sweat and your heart rate is up a bit. Strength training and other sedentary exercise didn't have the same effect on brain function as cardio did.

When you exercise, there are chemicals that get released in your body. They can affect many parts of your body, but they also improve your brain. They grow new cells and blood vessels, and help older brain cells survive even longer.

We already spoke about sleep and depression. Well when you're not getting enough rest and your mood is altered by a lack of sleep, it can cause brain fog. Exercise clears it up quickly and easily – and it doesn't take much to make it happen.

To try out this method of clarity, make it simple. Pick two days of the week and walk for one hour. Or, pick four days and walk for 30 minutes. That's all you need to achieve more mental clarity through exercise.

Just make sure you walk at a brisk pace. You don't have to run or jog, but do enough so that you're working up a sweat and your heart rate is starting to climb in a safe level for you.

The neural connections you'll be making will keep your mind healthy, just as the physical exercise will also strengthen your body. Consider it nourishment for your mind and body every time you lace up your shoes and start moving.

### **How to Begin Exercising as a Senior**

You first want to consult your doctor before you begin any type of exercise program. There is no one size fits all approach to moving your body – you may have some underlying conditions that require you to do certain things (or *not* do certain things).

If you have a condition like diabetes, then you have to monitor blood sugar, because exercise will lower those numbers. If this is the case, then you might have to carefully plan snacks and meals around your workouts.

Another issue with diabetics and exercise is that you have to carefully monitor your feet. Any type of injury or cut can go left untreated and fail to heal properly. Make sure you choose good shoes to exercise in.

Your doctor might have tips for you if you have a debilitating disease such as arthritis. Things like warming up before your workout will greatly improve your ability to complete an exercise routine.

You want to know what to keep track of in terms of whether or not you're overdoing it. You want to know where your heart rate should lie, what type of pain is normal versus dangerous, and so on.

Make sure you wear the right clothes. You want loose fitting clothes, but not so loose that they pose a hazard in terms of you tripping or getting tangled up during your exercise.

Make a decision about what type of exercise interests you – and where you want to focus more. If brain function is a concern, then make sure you work on getting cardio in slowly.

If mobility is an issue, add core strength training into your workout. If you have faulty knees and joints, focus on strengthening the muscles around your knees by doing certain leg exercises.

You can invest in some at home gym equipment, or use a gym outside of your home. Some of the more popular cardio equipment includes treadmills, elliptical machines and recumbent bikes.

You can also get a small set of dumbbells – handheld weights – or kettlebells, to help get you started with strength training. You can begin with a small 2- or 5-pound weight and move up as you grow stronger.

Of course, you don't have to use equipment at all! There are many ways to get cardio in – simply start walking in your neighborhood, or go to the mall or a park and walk enough to get your heart rate up.

You can learn all about body weight training, where you use nothing but the weight of your own body to strength train and increase the ability of your core.

Make sure that before you do either of these things, you have a plan in place to warm up and cool down before and after a workout.

You want to stretch your muscles to prevent injury. And the warm up and cool down can help keep your breathing levels intact so that you're not out of breath and struggling to finish your workout.

The most important thing is to make sure you're having fun with your new fitness routine. If it makes you look forward to it, you're doing something right. You may need to switch things up – go for a walk, go swimming, take a bike ride – and never get bored of your routine!



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