

Moving for Health Lesson Series Active Aging

Don't Lose It – Move It!

The aging process causes physical changes in the body. When it comes to physical performance (the ability to do physical activities) our abilities peak during the late teens and early 20s. By the mid-20s the ability to function physically starts to decrease. You might experience more feelings of tiredness, muscle weakness, and feel less able to work hard during activities that need endurance, such as cleaning or yard work. So it is great news to hear that regular physical activity can help to slow and reduce these changes to keep you active and healthy for a lifetime.

Physical activity provides many benefits. These benefits become much more important as the body ages. They include:

- Improved heart health.
- Increase in muscle mass and strength.
- Improved bone health.
- Improved ability to hold the body in good posture.
- Improved flexibility.
- Reduced risk of falls.
- Preserved cognitive or mental abilities.
- Decreased in the symptoms of depression.
- Increased self-worth.
- Increased feelings of control over one's health.



What Kind of Activity?

Older adults can benefit from physical activity in three areas.

- Endurance activity
- Resistance training
- Balance and flexibility training

Endurance

Endurance activities increase the heart rate for an extended period of time. They can improve heart health. Endurance activity might include:

- Walking.
- Bicycling, either stationary or outdoor.
- Dancing.
- Vigorous cleaning – mopping, vacuuming, scrubbing.
- Group exercise – chair aerobics, aquatics, low impact aerobics.

- Climbing stairs
- Vigorous yard work – lawn mowing, raking, pruning

Endurance activity burns calories, which can help in weight loss and weight maintenance. Maintaining a healthy weight and BMI can reduce the risk of chronic disease.

Weight-bearing endurance activity can improve bone health by increasing bone density and reducing losses in bone mass. Weight-bearing activities are those in which you are on your feet, or bearing the weight of your body. For example, walking would be weight-bearing, but cycling would not. The action of the foot or arm working or pounding against a force strengthens the bone by causing new bone tissue to form.

Examples of weight-bearing activity from the list above would include:

- Walking
- Dancing
- Low impact aerobics
- Climbing stairs



You should get 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity on most, preferably all days, of the week. Begin with low intensity activities and very gradually work up to moderate intensity activity. At a low intensity level you should be able to carry on a full conversation without being out of breath. At moderate intensity, you should still be able to talk to someone, but the increase in your breathing and heart rate begins to make it difficult to carry on a comfortable conversation.

It is important to warm up for about 5 minutes before starting an endurance activity. You can do this by simply marching. Also, the cooldown period becomes much more important as you get older. The risk of blood pooling in the legs which could result in a drop in blood pressure and feelings of dizziness increases in older adults. Increasing your cool down time to **10 to 15 minutes** can reduce this risk.

Resistance

As the body ages, lean body mass (muscle mass) is lost each year. Once in your mid-50s this decrease can be as much as 1% a year. This loss of lean body mass is called *sarcopenia*.

Resistance training is working the muscles against a force. This force can be a weight, an exercise band, or your own body weight. Regular resistance training can have the following benefits in relation to aging:

- Increased muscle strength and endurance.
- Reduced risk of falls.
- Improvement in overall ability to move, or mobility.
- Ability to perform normal, daily activities more easily.
- Ability to extend years of living on your own without assistance.

For safe resistance training:

- Focus on a well-balanced routine of 8 to 10 exercises that work each of the major muscle groups.
- Resistance training should be done at least two times a week. At least 48 hours of rest should be taken between sessions.
- Begin with at least one set of 10 to 15 repetitions.
- Sessions should be no longer than 20 to 30 minutes.

In addition, daily activities such as cleaning, gardening, and walking may keep your muscles strong.

Balance and Flexibility

Balance and flexibility is very important to maintain overall function and to perform daily activities. When combined with activities that build muscle strength, balance and flexibility training can reduce the risk of falling. Falling and the injuries that can result from falls can force older adults to be dependant on others for their care and normal daily activities. Other types of activities such as endurance exercise and resistance training can result in improvements in balance and flexibility; however, activities that focus specifically on balance and flexibility can also help you improve these areas and gain benefits.

Balance exercises may include:

- Standing with feet together.
- Standing with feet apart.
- Standing on one leg.
- Standing with feet together and raising onto your toes.
- Walking on a straight line.
- Walking heel-to-toe.



These activities can be made harder by closing your eyes, but be sure you have support, such as a sturdy chair, within reach.

Aging and decreased use can cause joints, and what is connected to them (muscle, tendons, etc.), to become tight. This can make movements such as bending, reaching, and even walking painful. Flexibility is defined as the ability of joints to move through their full range of motion. By working to maintain flexibility throughout aging, you can make everyday movement easier and less painful.

If you are new to physical activity, flexibility training may be the best place to start. Here are a few tips:

- Be sure the body is warmed up before stretching.
- Stretch each of the major muscle groups.
- Focus on static stretches, those in which you slowly ease into the movement and hold.
- Hold each stretch for 10 to 30 seconds.
- Perform each stretch at least 4 times.
- Stretching should be performed 2 to 3 days a week.
- If it hurts, stop! Stretch only to mild discomfort, not pain.

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