

Active Aging

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NOTE If you are experiencing health conditions, injuries or limitations of any kind, it is important to get professional advice from your healthcare provider before beginning an exercise routine or making changes to an existing routine.

1. Why is physical activity and exercise important for seniors?

Physical Activity and Exercise improve:

- Joint mobility
- Muscle and bone strength
- Balance and stability (which will help to prevent falls)
- Posture
- Heart and lung health
- Sleep quality
- Energy level
- Mood
- Confidence and self-esteem
- Blood circulation

Exercise also:

- Helps lower blood sugar levels in those living with diabetes, which in turn decreases the risk of diabetes complications
- Can be a key factor in reducing the risk of various health conditions and their complications (e.g. high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, etc.)

“Find activities and exercises that you enjoy. Celebrate your body with gratitude and through the amazing gift of movement.” – Crystal Bomberry


Exercising throughout life enables us to maintain good holistic health, make improvements to our health and increase our ability to live longer independent lives. Exercise, especially when done enjoyably, improves our quality of life. It is important not only for our physical health but also our mental and emotional well-being too. Exercising with a friend, family member or a group adds the pleasure of positive social relations that benefit our mental and emotional health in a good way.

2. What type of exercise is safe for seniors at any level?

Gentle, mindful exercise is safest for seniors at any level (with their family Doctor’s approval), as is the case with all ages. It is important to stay within your capabilities, within a safe range of motion, and to pay attention to your body’s messaging. Ignoring your body’s messages and pushing beyond a safe limit risks injury and disrespects your body. If there is pain, dizziness or light-headedness, it is important to stop the exercise and consult with a healthcare professional.

It is important to acknowledge that our cultural activities kept us all very active and healthy long before our transition to modern-day living. Many of our people still engage in cultural activities and possibly even more often than current methods of exercise.

More structured or planned exercises that one can do gently and mindfully are:

<p>Walking Basic stretches for the muscle groups</p>	<p>Resistance exercise for muscle toning and strength, using bodyweight, free weights, weight machines, and/or a variety of other equipment</p>
<p>Yoga (this includes seated yoga which is great for those not able to transition easily or safely from standing to the floor, or from the floor to standing)</p>	<p>Tai chi Swimming Stationary bike</p>
	
<p>Chair exercise (seated and/or standing exercises using the chair as a support for balance)</p>	<p>Fun Fact One can also engage in light physical activity through gardening, housework and yard work!</p>

3. What is the recommended frequency and duration of activity for seniors?

To achieve optimal health benefits it is recommended that we accumulate 150 minutes of physical activity per week, which averages out to:

Time 30 minutes per day

Frequency 5 days per week

Intensity or “how hard you work” will vary between individuals depending on fitness level and mobility. If fairly inactive or new to exercise, always start at a light intensity and improve by building gradually over time. Otherwise, generally aim for and build from a moderate intensity.

Cardiorespiratory/Endurance Exercise [4-7 days per week]

These types of exercises usually require use of the whole body (multiple muscles & joints) for a certain duration of time. Examples include walking, jogging, biking, rowing, skiing, swimming, elliptical machine, etc. Intensity of cardio exercise can be light, moderate or vigorous, and depends on the activity level and fitness of the individual. It is important to self-monitor heart rate and breathing by ensuring that:

- your heart rate is not too rapid; if it is, slow down
- you can string together at least 3 words when talking
- you are not sweating too profusely
- you find out your maximum heart rate and work within a safe heart rate range for your fitness level (consult with a professional if you would like to be aware of these numbers; otherwise, the previous 3 items are simple ways to monitor intensity level and exercise safely)

Caution *Stop exercising if you feel pain, faint, dizzy or light-headed, and consult with a health professional*

Resistance/Strength Exercise [2-4 days per week]

Exercises should be based on your interests and capabilities. Generally, resistance exercise can be done using bodyweight alone, or with the addition of equipment such as dumbbells, weight machines, resistance bands or other means.



Stretching/Flexibility Exercise [4-7 days per week]

Engage in gentle stretches for the muscle groups or develop a regular yoga practice. These types of activities can be done daily, but at the very least, 4 days per week. This category of movement promotes lengthening of the muscles (and strengthening in the case of yoga), gentle activation of the joints, and prevention of tension build-up in the body. Going through a series of general stretches for the muscle groups can be done in about 10 minutes and each stretch should be held for about 10-30 seconds, depending on your needs.

Yoga, although a non-impact activity commonly known for its numerous beneficial impacts on the body, is a holistic practice intended to unify body, mind and spirit. It is rooted in ancient Indian wisdom from the East. It is a mindful approach to personal growth and development. At the foundation of yoga is attention to breath and body in present-moment awareness. To honour the origins of yoga, we must know that it is much more than a physical practice. See Patanjali's Eight Limbs of Yoga.

Here is a YouTube link to a short Seated Chair Yoga Practice with Crystal Bomberry, Diabetes Wellness Worker, from the Indigenous Diabetes Health Circle:

Agadon'he' Video 8 Yoga In A Chair Level 1
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Uat251JTKc>

