

Fitness: It's Never Too Late to Start

With nearly a quarter of all health club membership being held by people fifty-five and above, the fitness industry is looking at new ways to cater to these baby boomers. Fifteen years ago the target demographic was the young and upwardly mobile. Today, those folks have arrived and they're looking for new ways of staying healthy and fit.

Those ways are getting easier to find. Top gyms and fitness programs are offering more low-impact exercises. Even the advertising is changing. No longer are they using only the god and goddess-like bodies of twenty-somethings but are picturing normal every day people with a little gray in their hair and a little fat on their tummies.

Now, if going to the gym is still not your "thing" no matter how many changes they make, don't worry. You can tailor your own home fitness routine to fit your lifestyle.

Walking may be the most obvious and simple place to start. Start slowly. You are just asking for an injury if you suddenly decide to walk two miles after a year of considering a jaunt through the supermarket aisle to be a hike. Even if you have been walking already, don't spontaneously add another two miles. Instead, walk a few steps farther or five minutes longer every day until you've reached your goal.

It's good to get thirty minutes of movement in a day. If you find thirty minutes at a time to be difficult, whether due to your current fitness level or time constraints, break it up. Walk for fifteen minutes two times a day. Or switch it up and do fifteen minutes of yoga and walk fifteen minutes. You are creating your own workout. Do it your way. But do it safely. Knee and back injuries are not uncommon and they can put a real crimp in your whole fitness goal.

If you are starting from scratch, you may want to start with strengthening exercises. Many of us are caring for elderly parents who have suffered broken hips or other injuries from falling. Maybe that's what motivated you to get in shape. Strengthening exercises are the right place to start. It doesn't take a big increase in muscle size to make a noticeable difference in strength and ease of movement. Strengthening exercises will also increase your metabolism and make you less prone to developing diabetes.

Another important exercise is for balance. Balance exercises, like strength exercises, can help you avoid a fall that could result in injury. Balance exercises target leg muscles.

Stretching exercises play a very important part in maintaining your range of movement. Doing stretching exercises can bring you more fluid, graceful movements and allow you to keep reaching for those healthy snacks you have hidden on the top kitchen shelf. They may also help you avoid the pain of strained or pulled muscles or tendons.

Also important are endurance exercises, which brings us back to walking. Swimming, jogging and biking also qualify as endurance exercises. Anything that increases your heart rate and breathing for any length of time is an exercise of endurance. Again, start out slowly and work your way up, incrementally, to your goal.

Many of the newer yoga programs incorporate all four of these exercises. Yoga programs are very popular and new centers are springing up everywhere. There are also tapes and DVDs available for home yoga workouts. I recommend investing in a mat whether you choose to take a class or follow a tape. It is difficult to concentrate if your hands or feet are sliding out of position. Also, wear comfortable clothing that is neither binding nor too loose. Whether you are working out alone or with a group, don't worry about getting the latest yoga clothes. Anything that feels comfortable and allows you to move freely is perfectly fine.

Now, if you have been saving your pennies for years and the kids have graduated college and are creating lives of their own, you may want to consider a fitness get-a-way. You have worked hard over the years. You've been everything to everyone. Now, it's time to take care of yourself. There are fitness trips to suit your travel and activity tastes. You can go to a mountain spa or take a cruise and learn to snorkel. Many of the spas offer healthy cooking classes so that when you get home, you can continue to feed your body with delicious life-extending and life-enriching meals. You can become a whole new person and be given the tools to maintain that person for a happier and healthier life when you get home.

This is the time you've waited for. These are the days you thought of once and called "someday." "Someday I'm going to get in shape." "Someday I'll start eating right." "One of these days I'm going to start walking and getting out more." Well, this is one of those days. Grab a bottle of water, put on a good pair of sneakers and get out there. Breathe. Enjoy. This is the life you've been waiting for.

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