

Exercising in your 50s, 60s, 70s and beyond

May 23 2012, By Evie Polsley and Anne Dillon

(Medical Xpress) -- A recent study has shown that exercise can add years to a person's life. Still, as we age it can become more tedious and sometimes more difficult to exercise. Many people see aging as a time to slow down and take it easy. The reality is the more we age, the more we need exercise to keep us independent and healthy. Still, it sometimes takes a prescription from the doctor to get adults up and moving.

“Exercise is important for almost everyone. There are very few medical conditions that exercise won't benefit. In fact, I sometime write a prescription to get my patients to start taking this seriously and help them understand exercise can be just as helpful as medication,” said Dr. Keith Veselik, director of primary care at Loyola University Health System and associate professor in the Department of Medicine at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine.

“Around age 35 is when our muscle mass and resting metabolism starts to decrease. When this happens our bodies require more, not less exercise to manage our caloric intake. When this starts to happen we can eat the same things, do the same things and may gain 3 pounds a year. That's 30 pounds in a decade,” he said.

Though exercising is beneficial to nearly everyone, before starting a program he advised that people, especially those who have not been active, consult a doctor to determine their baseline and to get guidance about what exercises would be most beneficial.

“In my own life I've seen the benefits of exercising. When that alarm

goes off in the morning I want to just roll over, but I've seen such a positive change in so many ways. It can be difficult, especially at first, but the benefits truly outweigh the struggles," Veselik said.

Veselik said the best workout program balances cardiovascular exercise, strength training and flexibility. He recommends an hour of cardiovascular exercise four days a week, two days of strength training for 30 minutes and balance and flexibility exercises such as stretching, yoga or pilates, one to two times a week.

But what is optimal doesn't always translate into what is doable. Each decade has unique challenges. Veselik gives some ideas on how to use exercise to counter those health hurdles.

In Your 50s:

Muscle and joint aches and pains start becoming more apparent, so Veselik said get creative about how to keep up cardiovascular exercise that is easy on the joints but gets the heart rate up. He suggests exercising in a pool or riding a bike instead of running. If you do run, make sure you have good shoes and try to run on softer surfaces.

Cardiovascular exercise also helps to fight many of the most common and deadly medical concerns, including heart disease, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

"But don't go from doing nothing to running a marathon. Talk to your doctor, ask about risk factors and together create a plan that's right for you," Veselik said.

Another nearly universal complaint for people in their 50s is back pain.

"The best way to protect your back is to build strong core muscles and

make sure you are lifting heavy objects correctly,” Veselik said.

In Your 60s:

As we enter our 60s, balance and strength should be a major focus. Many people are scared of breaking a hip, which can limit independence. Also, our bones aren’t as strong and both men and women become more susceptible to osteoporosis.

To help battle these concerns, Veselik suggested incorporating balance and leg strengthening exercises to increase flexibility as well as balance to help prevent accidental falls. Weight-bearing exercise is crucial to bone health and keeping bone density strong.

In addition, many adults in their 60s begin to experience symptoms from arthritis, which can make exercise difficult.

“Exercise has been proven to help people deal with their arthritis. It’s just making sure your exercise routine is working for you, not against you. Some people forget that walking is a great form of exercise, just make sure you get your heart rate up. Also, aquatic classes or swimming are a great way for people with arthritis or fibromyalgia to exercise,” Veselik said.

In Your 70s and Beyond:

“The biggest worry I hear from my patients who are entering their 70s, 80s and beyond is dementia. The two most common forms are Alzheimer’s and vascular dementia,” Veselik said.

He also said that exercise is the only thing that is proven to prevent Alzheimer’s. And, many of the major risk factors for vascular dementia,

high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes, can be countered with exercise.

“[Exercise](#) is important, but it’s not the end-all. It needs to be coupled with eating right and incorporating other healthy habits to lead to a better quality of life,” Veselik said.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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