

Cardio, weights and the right foods: Keys to staying healthy over 50

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Keep moving. Do you want to stay healthier as you push past 50? Ward off arthritis and other conditions that come with age? Then get up and get active.

That's what Dr. Nicholas Van Der Ahe, a [primary care physician](#) with Atrium Health Floyd, said would be of great benefit to folks over 50.

"Try to get at least two-and-a-half hours of exercise a week," he said. "That's about 150 minutes of exercise throughout the week. It's shown to have great benefits for people over 50."

That includes a balance of cardio and weightlifting.

"Keep moving," he said. "When you slow down, your body does the same. You want to keep things like arthritis at bay? Stay active. Do as much as you can comfortably do. I'm not saying you have to go out and run a marathon. But get some pool work in, or get on a bicycle or the elliptical. Do some yoga."

Tammy Sprayberry recently turned 51 and said she's made a real effort to eat healthier. But she only started exercising regularly about five or six years ago. She hired a personal trainer.

"It's the best thing I've ever done," she said. "If you're just trying to get started on sort of a fitness journey and you have the means, I would recommend hiring a personal trainer. So many times you try to join a gym and you overdo it or get frustrated. But if you find someone who understand where you are fitness-wise it makes a world of difference.

Sprayberry started with 5 pound arm weights. Now she's up to 30 pound weights.

She wants to assure others who are past the age of 50 that it's absolutely not too late to begin living a healthier and more [active lifestyle](#). Even if you can't get a [personal trainer](#), she said, do little exercises and build from there.

"Start where you can," she said. "When I started jogging I went to my driveway and jogged to my mailbox and walked back. That's all I could do. Gradually I added a little more distance. Don't be afraid to start as slowly as you need to and gradually increase. But start."

Sprayberry made a little chart to track her exercises. And she kept charting her progress which came in little increments at first. But it didn't stay that way.

Just recently, she completed the Savage Race, an obstacle race in which participants have to complete a number of unusual obstacles before reaching the finish line.

In 2019, Sprayberry completed a triathlon.

"It was a shorter sprint distance but it's still a triathlon," she said. "A friend suggested we do that and I said I can't do a triathlon. I don't know how to swim. My friend told said "Well, take swimming lessons." So I did. I think I came in next to last, but I did it. I've done several since then.

Since beginning a fitness journey, Tammy has lost over 100 lbs.

"I still eat some things that probably aren't great for me and I still have a beer on a Friday night," she said. "But I also do CrossFit. The gym I go to is so encouraging. Every victory I have is a victory for them too. When I go in the morning I'm the oldest one there, but that doesn't matter."

Matt Christiansen is 52 and said he comes from "low and sturdy Irish stock." He didn't like how he looked at an early age and proceeded to over-exercise and didn't eat right.

At 48 he started doing yoga which he said completely transformed his body.

"It's one of those things you don't think is hard but it's incredibly hard," he said. "It's hard but it had so many benefits for me. It completely transformed my body. I'd been working out (in a gym) for years but never saw more impact on my core and my stability than when I started doing yoga. It just gave me a better awareness of how I'm standing and sitting."

And it's accessible, he said. Almost anyone can do it. You can join a class or get an instructor or you can do it at home.

"When you go to yoga it's probably the most rewarding as far as results you can see and the mental side of it as well," Matt said. "You go in and work your butt off but you're so zen at the end. There's something new to learn every day whether that's hitting a new pose or fixing your form a little bit or tapping into cues your instructor is giving you."

Van Der Ahe also said your diet is more important to your health as you age.

"Eat a lot of fruits, vegetables and whole grains," he said. "If I had pick one of the diets that I'd really recommend for people over 50 it would be the Mediterranean Diet. It includes fruits, vegetables, seeds, nuts, whole grains and [healthy fats](#) such as avocados and [olive oil](#) as opposed to saturated fats.

"And remember to stay active," he added. "That's the key."

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