

Exercise for Elders

A question that retirees don't like hearing is "how old are you?" Since the required answer has to be a numerical figure, there's no way around it. The important thing now is what you could do to age but still be in good physical shape. What's even better is not just being strong, but how to look younger than your age.

The answer is actually pretty easy. If you don't have health problems that are hereditary, all you need to do is to look after yourself and your surroundings. Be aware that your physical health is undergoing change and there are common health risks that affect elder people. Common symptoms include degeneration of your heart and lungs which is revealed through loss of breath or becoming tired easily. Others include less ease in walking, getting up or going up the stairs. With that comes greater risk of falling down. All of this is accompanied by degeneration of joints and mobility. Eventually, vision and balance will be impaired which increases the chances of tripping and falling too. Falling down is a major risk among the elderly.

Besides the risk of falling down, another health issue that elder people need to watch out for are aches and pains in muscles and joints due to aging, as well as degeneration of artery vessels and the brain. Besides exercising to improve one's health, the wrong kind of exercise could accelerate existing physical impairments. Before we begin discussing exercise, we'll need to mention activities to avoid. Firstly, avoid any exercise activity that requires prolonged muscle tension. Also avoid exercise activities which are too strenuous such as activities which are too tiring or require heavy lifting. Those on medication may also want to observe how exercises interact with their medication and notice whether outcomes are positive or negative. This is especially important for medication related to heart conditions or sugar levels.

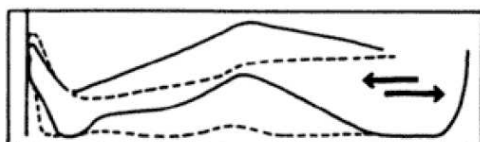
For elders who are planning to begin exercising, it is recommended that they begin with exercises that improve mobility and strength of joints, especially joints that are important for walking. Follow the illustrations shown; repeat each exercise routine 10-15 times a day.

Exercise routine to improve mobility of knee joints.

FIGURE 4: © 1999. Terry Boles



FIGURE 4. Knee flexion.



Hold the ends of a towel that is placed underneath your feet. Gently pull the towel towards you slowly, using both arms. This will cause your knees to bend. Try to lift up by approximately 4 to 5 inches and hold that position for 5 to 10 seconds. Rest for 1 minute and repeat this exercise routine 10 times. Do this daily for both sides. Begin from 1 session a day and gradually increase to 3 sessions per day.

Place your feet flat against the floor while in a seated or lying down position. Gradually slide your feet towards you, by bending your knees in small increments. Try not to incur any pain. Don't lift your knees while sliding your feet towards you, especially for people with knee injuries.

Exercise routine for strength of knee joints

FIGURE 7: © 1999. Terry Boles



FIGURE 7. Wall slide.

Lean partially or flush against a wall. Gently lower your body slowly with your back still leaning partially or flush against the wall. Keep lowering downwards until your knees bend at a 30 degree angle but not beyond the point where your knees extend beyond your toes. Then slowly return your body up to its original starting position. Your feet should be pointed straight ahead or slightly outwards. Repeat 5 to 10 times, starting with 1 session per day and gradually increase to 2 sessions per day.

FIGURE 8: © 1999. Terry Boles



FIGURE 8. Resisted knee extension.

Use an old bicycle inner-tire tube or rubber tube. Place your feet on top of it and gradually pull towards you until your knees form a 30 degree angle. Then gradually stretch your knees while pulling on the rubber tube. Repeat 5 to 10 times, starting with 1 session per day and gradually increase to 3 sessions per day.

When body joints have better mobility and strength, you may then begin to engage in other forms of exercise which are beneficial for your heart and lungs. This may include cycling or walking, but either activity should be moderated to produce only a bit of tiredness. Don't push yourself excessively. Spend 20-30 minutes on the exercise activity and aim to exercise at least 3 times a week. If you are not yet sufficiently strong, you may choose to divide up the exercise activity into smaller sessions of 10-15 minutes each. If you choose a lighter form of exercise such as Chinese aerobics, you may extend the exercise session to as long as 45 minutes.

Additional Tips

- Select an exercise activity that you personally prefer or good at.
- Gradually adjust or modify the exercise activity in small increments, especially for activities in which you are not yet good at.
- If you encounter chest pains, neck pains, loss of breath or feel discomfort, you should stop the activity. Don't force yourself to continue. Find time to see and consult a doctor.
- Don't physically force yourself to perform an activity that you are not capable of doing.
- It is recommended that you exercise with others or friends which may be able to assist you in certain cases.

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