

Dear Age Sage,

I am 75 years old and trying to do all that I can to maintain my health as I age. I eat pretty well, I take things in stride, and I have lots of friends at my church. On a recent visit to my doctor, it seems that my osteoporosis is getting worse. She mentioned that I should look into strength training. I have never been much of an exerciser, and I can't even picture myself lifting weights! Any advice on how I can get started?

Strong mind, Weak body

Dear Strong Mind:

You are not alone. Only 32% of adults 65 and older follow a regular plan of exercise. Studies show that the reason for this are fear of falling, fear of chest pain, fear of becoming short of breath, and the feeling that they should not exercise because of some disease state, and the feeling that inactivity is just part of getting old.

The benefits of exercise for older adults are numerous: lower overall mortality, lower risk of diseases - heart, colon cancer, breast cancer, diabetes - lower risk of obesity, decreases blood pressure, improves mood, decreases depression, relieves symptoms of arthritis, lowers risk of falling, improves sleep, decreases constipation, increases metabolism, and improves posture and flexibility.

Now, how can you get started?

First of all, your program should include 3 complementary areas:

1. Aerobic - find a friend to walk with, briskly, for 30 minutes, 5-7 times per week. This will condition your heart and lungs, build endurance, as well as improve your bone density. In the bad weather, walk in the mall.
2. Strength Train - I know you can't picture yourself weight lifting, but you have to, and you have to 2-3 times per week. This will build and maintain strong muscles and bones. You can join a gym; get a personal trainer to work with you for a few sessions to get you started on a program. You can start your own program at home by buying a book such as the one by Miriam Nelson, Ph.D., called Strong Women, Strong Bones. Miriam Nelson, a professor at Tufts University, conducted research that was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Her research showed that after a year of strength training twice a week, women's bodies were 15 to 20 years more youthful; they had less fat and more muscle; bone loss was prevented or reversed; their strength and energy increased dramatically; and they showed surprising gains in balance and flexibility. This book shows you how to tailor a program to your needs. It is filled with inspiring quotes and motivational tips. My favorite story is about the 90 year old woman who

could not walk up stairs. After following the program for 12 weeks, she can now walk up stairs, 2 at a time!

3. Flexibility and Balance - Good flexibility and balance will prevent injuries and falls. Work on flexibility and balance 3 times a week to maintain it, 5-7 times a week to improve it. Studies show a direct correlation between decreased strength with loss of balance and increased risk of falls. The book that I just mentioned above will also guide you in flexibility and balance work.

Some of the strength training and flexibility and balance work can be done while you are watching television, talking on the phone or listening to your favorite music.

Here are some motivational tips for starting your program:

- Start slowly, with both the number of exercises that you do and the length of each session
- Use visualization daily: visualize yourself completing a great work out
- Take responsibility for your emotional and physical health
- Schedule, prepare and plan your exercise: make a regular appointment with yourself
- Set realistic goals
- Make exercise a top priority
- Keep a daily exercise log
- Enjoy your work outs
- Believe in yourself: you CAN do it!

One final quote from The President of the American Geriatrics Society, James E. Fanale, MD, "People who get active or stay active as they age are more secure on their feet, safer in their homes, and most importantly, remain independent longer."

TIP:

Don't feel guilty when you miss a session or two; negative feelings hinder motivation. It's never too late to get started again.

Until next month,

The Age Sage

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