



LIVING AN ACTIVE

# Lifestyle

FOR OVER 50s

With the average life expectancy of Americans continuing to rise, it is no surprise that there are more and more people exercising well into their 60s and 70s. There are some good reasons to do so, as well, and that's not just for vanity or cosmetic reasons!

Believe it or not, there have been studies that show that most of the things that we consider as signs of aging are actually more likely to be signs that the body has fallen into disuse instead of simply growing old. A study in *The Journal of the American Geriatric Society* has revealed that inactivity will double your risk for mobility limitations as one gets older, whereas regular exercise of the joints has the inverse effect.

There was another study in *The Journal of Neurology* that credited regular exercise as a way to keep your mind focused as well, effectively slowing down cognitive decline, which keeps you from going dependent on others for longer. With these discoveries in mind, it isn't hard to figure out why the number of people of both genders getting more active after 50 has gone up over 400% since 2012.

The great thing about these discoveries is that they mention that it isn't ever too late to get a start toward your goals. There is always added perks to getting started on an exercise regimen as early as possible, such as a maximized sleep quality and fewer incidents involving broken bones, but if somebody has fallen out of it or has never started in the first place, that same person can still reap the benefits of an active lifestyle; the important part is that one makes an effort to keep regularly exercised.

There are many ways to go about adding some exercise to your daily routine. One of the most common ways to get into fitness is the same way that you would if you were starting your exercise regimen in your twenties: Hitting the gym. Working with a trainer or in a group has always helped with motivation to keep at it, and the right trainer can be a valuable tool to achieve your goal. Not only can they answer questions about the gym itself, but if you're honest with them about your medical history and your goals, they can help you find the best workouts and teach you how to work around certain ailments, such as your stiff knees or your bad back.

If you don't have the time or motivation to join a gym, there are plenty of ways to add in exercise without it. My stepfather, for example, likes to do stretches and cardio while he watches TV, and my mother-in-law prefers to go out and take a forty-five minute walk around her scenic neighborhood. The benefits to this go beyond not having time for the gym. If you love a certain activity, you're more likely to do it and make time for it. So if you don't feel like dragging yourself to a health club three times a week, why not take yourself to the batting cages or join a local softball team? If leg presses make you cringe just at the thought of them, a swim works the same areas and more while being more gentle on your joints at the same time. It all comes down to doing something that you enjoy in a manner that you can enjoy it at your own pace.

One of the more common obstacles is that some people simply may not know where to start on their journey to a more active lifestyle. They might try to push themselves too hard for the first few weeks and end up too exhausted or sore to want to continue. Perhaps they do not have any activities that you know of that they enjoy, or they do have something they used to love doing, but feel they have to compete with themselves to get to the point that they were once at. These can all be extremely discouraging, but there are ways that anyone can get over these bumps:



- **It take more than 30 days to develop a habit.** Your first three months are going to be the hardest part of getting fit. In fact, this is where about 70% of people who resolve to get fit will drop out. On the other hand, that means that if you can stick it through the first season of your new fitness plan, you will find the rest of the time is going to be easier.

Use your first few months to start developing good habits early. Get into a great mindset, find your limits in your activity so that you will not go until you very simply can't anymore, find things to do that you enjoy doing, and get into the habit of keeping a fitness log. Trust me, it *will* come in handy, even if you aren't a journal keeping type of person.

- **Don't be afraid to try anything once.** If you are somebody who likes to go to the gym, check out their class schedule. Many, if not most, include all of these in your membership, and a lot of them will be more than happy to tell you individual pricing if you are not a member. If something sounds interesting to you, sign up for the class to try to get a feel for it. You are not obligated to go to any additional classes if you do not like it. Just cross it off your list and try another class.

If you are not a gym body, there are plenty of activities that you can find around town to try. Check the internet or your local newspaper and you are bound to find one that catches your eye. If nothing else, visit your local craft sales, farmer's markets, zoos, etc. and walk from location to location as you look around. Walking is good exercise, and depending on where you walk, you can distract yourself and take a break to see

something you find interesting.

- **Remember that your health is not a contest.** It's easy to get a little competitive when your endorphins are high, even when it's yourself you're going against. You're going to find yourself trying to push harder, maybe even harder than you should. Studies show that the important part of an exercise is your consistency, not how many reps you do or how long you hold a position. In fact, the only people that benefit from a stretch lasting over 60 seconds are a very niche group, and you can actually do more damage to yourself by doing that one more rep. The important part to an exercise is that you *feel* exercised, but you do not feel like you are too exhausted to do a thing after you exercise.

Speaking of being too exhausted to exercise...

- **There is absolutely no “best time” to exercise.** If your mornings are busy, choose to exercise in the evening. You do not need to feel obligated to get up an hour early to get the most out of your new routine. This common exercise myth comes from a variety of factors, ranging from the fact that exercise is proven to wake you up more effectively than a cup of coffee to eliminating the excuse of being too tired after work. The best time to exercise is when you can make time to do it, plain and simple. You will get the same results to your workout no matter when you do them.
- **You are your own worst critic.** A common issue is comparing yourself to when you were younger. This is a major setback to any fitness plan and goes back to how your health is not a contest. Just like how you cannot expect to get as far on a road that you haven't been on since they finished construction twenty years ago as fast as you could beforehand, you cannot expect to go as fast or hard as you could twenty years ago. As you begin to exercise more often, you'll find that you'll get stronger in time. If you find yourself overthinking everything, stop yourself and have a water break.

If your criticism is actually that you find yourself progressing slower than others doing the same thing, keep in mind that, once again, the point of exercise is that you feel exercised. Your body is going to react differently to exercise than somebody else's body, and there is actually a chance that your body may not be suited for a certain type of exercise at all. Progress may be slower than you want it to be, but if you are still progressing, then keep at it. Should you feel you are not progressing at all...

- **There is no shame in asking for guidance.** One of the benefits to joining a gym or health club is that you will have access to a trainer. It is their job to see to it that whatever your goal is, from weight loss to gaining more energy, you are going to achieve it. With this in mind, they are going to be experts in finding problems with your current regimen, and will be more than willing to share this information and work with you in order to further your progress. Asking questions is the fastest way to get the answers that you are looking for, whether it be why you are feeling like you have not made ground or that you are not enjoying a specific exercise and don't know what you can do to replace it. If you can afford one, a personal trainer can give you more personal attention and focus entirely on you instead of a group. They are an excellent investment, especially if you are serious about reaching your goals.

- **There are some exercises that you should not do past a certain age.** Not only are they not as beneficial to you after a certain point in your life, but some of them can actually do more harm than good. For example, weightlifting can actually cause a sudden spike in your blood pressure, and high impact cardio such as jumping jacks are going to put undue stress on your joints. Of course, there are ways to work around these issues, but it will require research to find replacements if these were once your go-to exercises. Bodyweight exercises are not as likely to cause the blood pressure spike that weightlifting gives, for example, and swimming aerobics will give you the same moves as a high impact cardio workout with water pressure “cushioning” your joints, sparing them that much extra stress. Make sure that you are aware of your medical history and if you have any questions about if an exercise is right for you personally, feel free to ask your doctor next appointment. You are advised to talk about any new exercise or diet plans with your doctor before you start them, so you might as well use your time with them to ask any questions while you're there.
- **Your health is not just about your exercise plan.** This part can be easy to forget. You can be doing everything right with your fitness plan, but it can be sabotaged by what you are eating and how much you are eating it. You can do everything right with both your diet and your exercise, but your family history predispositions you to certain ailments that can impede your progress. It is all a giant balancing act, and you have to figure out where your weaknesses lie so that you can work around them, and it can be extremely discouraging and frustrating when something is not working the way that you want it and you just cannot pinpoint the problem yourself. Keeping a log and trying to keep up with what exercises you did and what all you ate is a good idea because when that happens and you cannot figure it out yourself, you can always take it in to your doctor or trainer and they can help you find the problem using your own log. Besides, it's always fun to look at where you were and how much more you can do now, which can be a major motivational boost right when you need it.
- **Remember to watch what you eat.** There is a misconception that you will burn more fat if you choose to exercise on an empty stomach, and if your goal is to lose weight, this becomes even more of a tempting bump to hit. Food is fuel, and if you try to run your body too hard without any fuel, the consequences can show themselves in the form of dizziness, faster dehydration, and torn muscle and ligaments that have ended up losing elasticity. Running on dirty fuel can be just as dangerous, so make sure that you know what you are putting in your body.

Your body is going to be more prone to handling certain types of fuel better at some points of the day versus others. For example, carbohydrates are typically going to be optimized when you eat them within the first three hours of your day. Make sure to note how you are feeling about an hour after each meal, as your body is going to tell you more than an article is able to. This is another reason to keep that log with you – it's easier to follow your own eating habits if you can actually look back at what you have eaten. It also makes you think twice about mindless snacking if you have to write it down.

- **Focus on your achievements, not your drawbacks, and celebrate your successes.** When all you focus on is the failures, that is what you will set yourself up

for. Instead, focus on how far you've come and when you hit a milestone, such as dropping ten pounds, make sure that you treat yourself to a massage or a round of your favorite activity. This will keep your spirits up and make sure that you keep at it, and consistency is key to success.

If you find yourself not able to focus on any of your successes, then perhaps you should consider finding a workout partner to help you out. When you have somebody else holding you accountable for your end of the work, you are more likely to do it. Besides, it's so much more fun to work out with someone else and have someone there to celebrate your victories with!

- **Where there is a will, there is always a way!** If you are considering limiting your exercise to prevent further injury, talk to your doctor or trainer about these fears. You'll find that this is a common concern and they may have a few ideas to keep you going. Stationary bicycles have been a common suggestion for issues with your back and your legs due to the low impact, for example. When it comes to illness, signs of a cold, such as a sore throat, will have no impact on your exercise and will not affect your risks during physical activity. As long as you are willing to keep exercising, you will have a network of support that will be willing to help you keep going toward your goals, so don't give up easily.

Most importantly, though, remember that you will be able to help yourself through any beginning the journey bumps or mid-adventure plateaus that you come across. It may seem a lot to take in, but keep improving; you will find that these may even come naturally. Before you know it, you will be gaining strength, flexibility, and endurance, losing weight, and keeping up with your grandchildren much easier than you have been doing in the past. Of course, health and fitness is not an easy journey, but you will find that it's a lot less effort to keep up some "routine maintenance" on yourself than it will ever be to struggle to do everyday tasks, even the ones that you hated when you were younger. Just like maintaining your car will improve engine life and help you catch the problems that you cannot prevent early, maintaining your body will help improve your quality of life and will help give you an early alert when something goes wrong with your body. It won't magically solve all your problems, but you will find that you'll have the resources to handle the cards you are dealt with while eliminating or reducing several deuces from your hand. In the end, you'll be glad you did it!

