



SPORTS
FOR OVER 50s

As you get older, it can be easy to believe that feeling weak and tired is just part and parcel of the process. After all, many of your friends are going down the same path: without energy to do much activity, or the strength to handle much of a daily routine they used to breeze through. But actually, losing our health as we age doesn't necessarily have to happen.

There are countless cases of people over 50, some even older, going out jogging every day, powerlifting more weight than many young people, even competing in marathons and bodybuilding contests. In his late 60s Arnold Schwarzenegger was still pushing bodybuilding routines to be in best shape for films.

At 71 Joy Prouty launched Zumba Gold. Arthur De Vaney, a fitness and diet advisor, was still lifting heavy weights at seventy nine. Tao Porchon-Lynch taught yoga at 98, with a 75 year career behind her at that point. And Indian bodybuilder Manohar Aich was still lifting well past 100 years old. You've probably even seen examples yourself: the sprightly nonagenarian gardening, the 60-something out jogging every morning, or the Crossfit enthusiast who's already a grandparent. How do they do it?

Naturally, there is no magic formula for good health. But there are ways of exercising and indulging in sports for almost everyone, if you approach it from the right angle. First of all we need to consider all the variables when selecting a sport for you. Choosing a sport isn't as much about what will make you the healthiest in the long run, or about what is medically recommended. It doesn't matter that jogging increases your life expectancy if you can't, for whatever reason, get up and jog regularly. You need to choose something that suits your body and lifestyle. Consider these questions and answer them honestly.

Do you have any physical ailments?

Are all your joints in working order? Do you have existing injury sites, or old surgical sites? Try and be considerate of any part of your body that is injured or prone to injury. You need to work your routine around it. For example, if you have arthritis in your hands, you don't want to do weightlifting. Or if you have had abdominal surgery you don't want to be stressing your midsection. Don't assume just because you can't do one part of an activity that you can't do it at all, though. Plenty of amateur marathon runners pace themselves, and people with abdominal stitches can do yoga as long as they don't stretch their stomachs too much. Working with a considerate professional and knowing your limits means you will probably be able to engage in any sport you like. That said: any physical ailment needs to be considered when starting exercise.

How much time do you have for exercising?

Can you commit to a schedule, or do you want the freedom to drop in as and when you like? It's important to be realistic about time. If we commit to four hours a week, but struggle to make it two, then we need to revise our plans. On the other hand, don't be too restrictive, especially if you're retired. Many of us assume we have no time for exercise, but easily free up an hour or two for television or going out with our friends. Make a serious commitment to fitness and choose a routine you can stick to confidently.

Do you prefer to exercise alone, with a close friend, or in a group? If you need your alone time, or cannot focus with others around you, you will need to choose a sport or exercise you can practise on your own. If you're generally an introvert or intimidated by crowds and strangers, then sessions with a close friend, personal trainer might be good to keep your

morale up. On the other hand, if you're thrilled to exercise with many people and love to talk and laugh as you exercise, then a class or a group sport might be a good choice for you. It's all about what environment brings out the best you have to offer.

How much money are you prepared to invest?

Although it is a myth that all fitness pursuits are expensive, there are some costs you may wish to consider if you have money to invest. At the free end we have calisthenics, dancing, and jogging, as well as free activities for over-50s. Then from there we can consider the cost of suitable clothes, gym memberships, or a personal trainer. And at the extreme end are expenses such as personal gym equipment. If you discover a sport you are very enthusiastic about, many higher expenses can be justified, but I would caution against spending too much from day one, as often you will find your first choices aren't permanent.

What sports interest you?

What activities do you like watching or reading about? What sports do your friends practice? This is an important consideration as well, as you need to enjoy what you're doing. Now, you could always try something completely new and turn out to love it. But usually we feel a greater commitment to things we have been interested in for a while.

Do you have more fun working on your endurance, pushing yourself to the limit, or taking it easy? Last but not least, consider your exercising style. It might take try a few different sports to work this one out, but people are usually divided into three types. The first type loves endurance activity. These people get lost in their thoughts as they walk, clean, or jog. Exercise leaves them in a zen-like state. They usually exercise alone. The second type loves pushing themselves to their limits. They set goals and work hard to reach them. They like measuring their performance and being encouraged and rewarded. They usually exercise alone or with another motivated person. The third type is more relaxed. This doesn't mean they won't exercise hard, but their focus is on having fun, not results or numbers. They don't take the exercise too seriously and don't mind making mistakes. They usually enjoy exercising with like-minded friends or in a large group. Which type most describes you?

By now you should have a rough idea what sort of activity you might start with. There are countless sports and exercise routines to consider, so be sure to factor in all your needs and you will find something that suits you perfectly. Everyone's needs and interests and abilities are different, but that said, there are some great beginner activities for someone who has not exercised for a while.

Walking

Walking is a popular activity among people of all ages seeking to get fit. Anything from a casual stroll around the neighborhood to hiking over hills and up mountains is a form of walking. The advantages of walking are many. Firstly, you can walk anywhere, at any time, in any clothes you like, so it isn't time restrictive or costly. Secondly it is an activity you can do alone or with others. Thirdly, it can be incorporated into a daily routine, for example by walking to the shops. The major downsides are that it can be difficult for heavier people or those with joint problems, and that it's hard to get your heart rate up for maximum cardiovascular benefits.

Football

Football is a great sport for everyone, and there are plenty of small five-a-side teams, women's' teams, and teams for over-50s. This makes it a very accessible sport. It is also fairly inexpensive, with most local clubs and groups requesting a small donation at the most. And it can be enjoyed indoors or outdoors in sports centers all across the country. The downsides are that it is a social activity, which means many people may be dissuaded, and that it requires appropriate clothing.

Tennis

Tennis is enjoyed by many people over fifty who are confident in the strength of their joints and wish to protect their hearts. It is a mildly social game with a strong competitive element, which motivates many people to push themselves to perform well. It is fairly accessible, with wheelchair and relaxed options available, and it can be practiced indoors or out. The downsides are that it requires proper clothing and equipment, and that less social people or less competitive people may not enjoy the pressure.

Yoga

Yoga is a great activity for people seeking a relaxed form of exercise which increases strength, flexibility, and even neurological abilities. Yoga can be pursued individually or in a class, and there is often very little pressure to perform, with the focus being on the mental and emotional benefits, as well as gradual progress, rather than the pursuit of perfection. The downsides are that it requires good joint mobility and specialist clothing and equipment.

Jogging

Jogging is another activity chosen by people over fifty who want to increase their cardiovascular health. However unlike tennis, it is not necessarily a group activity, or competitive. Instead, jogging can be a casual activity pursued on one's own, or even a group activity training for a marathon. Jogging requires some instruction to limit the risk of injury; contrary to popular belief you cannot just "get up and run". And you will need some specialist equipment too, namely good running shoes. Many people also find jogging a bit monotonous, so if you are a social person but can't jog with others, or if you're not a very social person but you can't get lost in your own thoughts, jogging may not be enjoyable.

Swimming



Swimming is a highly praised activity as it is gentle on the body, not too competitive, and easily enjoyed socially or on one's own. As the water bears most of your weight, it alleviates a lot of the pains which disabled people or those with joint complaints suffer during other exercises. For this reason it is also a great activity to begin weight loss, as it gets you moving whilst supporting most of your body weight. The major downsides are that you will need proper swimming gear and that it must always be done in a public place, which some may find inconvenient, costly, or embarrassing.

Zumba

Zumba has been surprisingly popular among people of all ages, fitness levels, and backgrounds. Something about the no-judgement, fun-focused group activity appeals to many people. It doesn't matter who you are or what your level of energy is, you will be welcomed to enjoy classes. The big downsides are that, with rare exception, Zumba classes can be expensive, that they are highly social, and that they may require good basic physical fitness. That said, classes for differently abled people are also available, which is especially good if you aren't sure about your ability to perform certain motions or keep pace. And many classes are welcoming of those who have less mobility, but it still might be a little disappointing to not be able to fully participate.

Dancing

Dancing is a staple of exercise routines loved by over fifties. Combining a physical task with a mental one, learning new and varied dance styles is great for keeping on top of your mental gymnastics as well as keeping your body in order. Other than making sure you are dressed comfortably there are no special clothing or equipment requirements. You can attend dance classes at first, if you're not familiar with any forms of dancing, and when you are comfortable with some basic dances you can join groups dedicated to practicing dance together. Dance is very inclusive, with women-only classes, dancing for wheelchair users,

and dance courses open to friends or homosexual couples all being available. The main downside is that dancing is a very social activity, which some may find stressful.

Volleyball

Volleyball is another great sport for the active, highly competitive person over fifty. It's a great game for those with the spring, strength, and skills to play it, and it keeps you active and social. You can play volleyball in pairs or teams, and there is plenty of opportunity to work on your skills and fight for points. Of course, all of volleyball's characteristics can be downsides for some of us: it might be *too* active, *too* social and *too* competitive for your liking. It also requires a specialist set-up, so you can't practice it anywhere, any time, and you may need to pay in order to access facilities where you can get a court with a net.

Weightlifting

Weightlifting isn't as extreme as many people think. Light weights, high repetitions, and a focus on what your body is best at can make weightlifting a fun, easy, inclusive activity. Regardless of how light the weight you are lifting will be, you will usually still need a personal trainer or experienced friend to show you how to lift healthily. This goes double for people with physical ailments. Weightlifting is also usually done in a public place, though it can still be a solitary activity if you want it to be. If you don't want to exercise in public, weightlifting equipment for your home can be expensive, and even dangerous if not installed correctly, so I would advise against it for beginners.

Once you know what to do, the next most important thing before you begin is to work out *how* you are going to do it. Check in with your doctor, first of all, and tell them about what activity you're considering doing, how often, etc. They will be able to give you advice and support in beginning this activity. This is especially important if you haven't exercised for a while or if you have any physical ailments. You need the all-clear.

Next, don't neglect the importance of a healthy diet. If you're going to change your output, you may need to change your input too. If you are overweight you need a weight loss diet that is complete and healthy. If you are happy with your weight you need to eat enough to fuel your body and ensure enough variety so as to not become deficient in anything. It is also important to remember that as we get older our energy needs go down. Even if we exercise, we will need to eat less than a younger person with a similar body performing the same exercises. This is why slow, steady weight gain is common as we age. So be sure to eat a balanced diet, with plenty of plants, healthy starches, and protein, and to eat enough, but not too much.

Supplements



Supplements, contrary to popular belief, aren't mandatory for anyone over a certain age. Whether or not you choose to supplement depends on your personal health profile, and your own beliefs and decisions. The most beneficial supplements for active people over fifty are protein supplements, vitamin D, omega oils, calcium, zinc, and magnesium. But always consult with your doctor before beginning a supplement regime of any kind.

When starting to exercise, start off slowly. Remember to warm up, although more recent research suggests that vigorous or thorough stretching may increase your risk of injury. Some light yoga stretches and a bit of fast-paced (for you) movement to get your heartrate up is all you need. If you feel warm, your heartrate and breathing are up, but you feel comfortable, then you're warming up right. As soon as every part of you feels prepared, you can begin your exercise.

Pace Yourself

Don't try and push yourself too hard seeking fast results. The best results are built up steadily, and rushing into it will just cause burnout and possibly even injury. Try and be mindful as you exercise. Pay attention to your body and its cues. It is a popular myth that exercise and fitness needs to hurt. Starting exercising can be uncomfortable: you will sweat, get a bit winded, get tired, and your muscles will ache afterwards. But if you feel pulling, pinching, or stabbing pains in your muscles or joints during activity, or aches and stickiness in your joints afterwards, then you need to stop. Either you are doing the movements wrong, or your body is not prepared for this activity.

Getting older can sometimes feel like losing a battle with our own health. This is especially so for those of us who used to be very active and can't keep up any more. However this doesn't need to be the case. There are many options for someone over fifty wanting to get back into sports and exercise, and there are many ways to make beginning to exercise

easier. Age, time, money, or physical ailments do not mean we cannot exercise and enjoy it. If you want to and really aim for it, you too can be a sixty year old gym-goer, a seventy year old Zumba enthusiast, a ninety year old yogi or a one hundred year old bodybuilder. The sky is the limit.