

Exercise and the Elderly

Guidelines have been recommended by the American College of Sports Medicine for older adults to maintain health and lower the risk of disease. A minimum of 30 minutes, five days per week of moderate intensity aerobic physical activity is recommended. Bouts of three to ten minutes of moderate intensity exercise are acceptable for those that have time or physical restraints. The committee additionally recommends that each older adult should perform physical activity to maintain or increase muscular strength a minimum of 2 days per week. This helps keep your strength for everyday activities and can help with improvement of bone density. Increased bone density minimizes the risk of a bone fracture in the event of a fall or other accident. (*Med. Sci. Sports Exer.*, Vol. 39, No 8 pp 1423-1434, 2007)

Endurance exercises such as walking, low impact aerobics and swimming are all excellent modes of exercise. Begin your intensity level at the lower end of your heart-rate range (40-65% of your max heart rate). You can figure your max heart rate by subtracting your age from 220. The ACSM recommends elderly individuals perform aerobic exercise at least five times per week. A longer and more gradual warm-up and cool down period of five minutes or more is recommended for the older adult. Strengthening can be performed in many different ways; for example, you can use no resistance with increased reps, small dumbbells, wrist weights, or resisted elastic bands. Two sets of 8-10 reps with zero to light resistance are appropriate for the older individual. Perform strength training 2 days per week for strength gains and/or prevention of muscle loss.

Before beginning an exercise program see your physician. Set reasonable goals for yourself and make it enjoyable. By creating a positive attitude toward exercise, you enhance the long-term commitment towards fitness. You can also meet with a certified personal trainer or physical therapist for a customized program tailored specifically to your wants and needs.

Article submitted by Jennifer Hackman, a physical therapist and athletic trainer at Excel Physical Therapy & Sports Medicine Clinic in Boonville, MO. For additional information about exercise classes specialized for the older individual call 660-882-6115. For website links with more information on exercise for the elderly, visit www.excelpt.net.