

# Seniors: "Why Exercise?"



There is a Fountain of Youth and the secret is, "exercise." Millions of seniors worldwide have discovered "exercise" is the key to staying mobile and reducing the risk of heart disease, diabetes and depression. Staying active is important for feeling better and living longer.

George Burns was quoted as saying, "If I knew I was going to live this long, I would have taken better care of myself!"

It's true that some people are blessed with good genes; my father is 95 and still lives in his own home. His older sister lived in her own home until she was 100. Life holds no guarantees and that is why proactive activity is good insurance for maintaining a healthier quality of life as we age.

Around age 40, muscle mass starts to decrease by 3-5%. After 50, this decline continues to increase. Muscle is what keeps us strong. It holds our skeleton, burns calories to help maintain a suitable weight and it is an important tissue for bone strength and balance. Without muscle, mobility can significantly decrease resulting in a loss of independence.

The good news... muscle can be built at any age of life as even aging muscle responds to exercise. One research study conducted in a nursing home in Boston, MA., using 100 male and female residents with the average age being 87, showed that exercise not only increased muscle mass and walking speed, but also muscle strength by an incredible 113%.

Flexibility also decreases with age. Although the studies showing changes in flexibility are not quite as extensive as those with muscle changes, evidence does suggest that stretching contributes to a significant increase in range of motion with neck, shoulder, elbow, wrist, hip, knee and ankle joints.

Balance is another area which can improve with exercise. Falling is a major contributor of fractures in the elderly and the second leading cause of spinal cord and brain injuries. Research has shown that muscle strength and balance exercises significantly reduce the risk of falling in people over the age of 70.

Staying active with regular exercise can also benefit cognitive function. Scientists have reported exciting research showing that the brain neurons, the special cells that help thinking, movement, performing bodily functions that sustain life and even helping memory all increase in number with just a few days or weeks of activity.

In one study, MRI scans were being used to measure the amount of brain tissue found in adults 55 years or older. They found consistent results of declination of brain volume with age. There were significant decreases in brain density in the areas of memory and thinking, but these losses were substantially reduced with cardiovascular activities.

Other testing has shown exercise improves age-related dementia, anxiety and depression.

To sustain your Fountain of Youth, there are four components which include:

1. Endurance activities such as walking, swimming or riding a bike. These activities increase cardiovascular health to reduce heart disease and increase circulation.
2. Strengthening exercises help build muscle tissue and reduce age-related muscle and bone loss.
3. Stretching exercises help to maintain flexibility and reduce arthritic pain.
4. Balance exercises reduce the risk of falls and injuries related to them.

As a kinesiologist, I understand how important movement is in maintaining one's lifestyle and as such, through my clinic, I offer "Stretch & Pilates" and a "Beginner's Stretch and Breath" program.

The "Stretch & Pilates" program is a combination of flexibility and core strengthening with gentle stretching and resistance exercises. The "Beginners Stretch & Breath" program is designed for those with a limited range of movement due to age, arthritic pain and/or damage or chronic pain to soft tissue or joints.

All of these programs will help to increase flexibility, strength and balance in a relaxed, gentle manner.

To register for the next session, call Susan Veale at 613-752-1540.