

Best activities for a healthy mind and body

Easy exercises suited to older adults

Mon., March 5, 2018

No matter your age, exercise is vital to your well-being. That's especially true for older adults. Physical activity reduces the risk of a number of health conditions. It keeps you strong, flexible and stable and is an important element of independence and longevity.

“Physical activity also creates new pathways in the brain and strengthens old pathways, plus there will be an increase in oxygen flow to the brain,” says Delmanor LivingWell coach Karen Hatch. If fitness is new in your life, it's important to start slow, says Hatch. “Look for exercise classes that are geared to beginners and work your way up, or hire a personal trainer to help you get started. Ultimately, your goal is to exercise for 150 minutes per week, but that can be broken down into segments of whatever length you like: two 10-minute walks a day for example.”

At any age, the key to success is to add variety to your workouts, so here are some examples of exercise strategies well-suited to older adults:

Walking with Nordic walking poles

“Nordic poles are great tools for stability,” explains Sue Merritt, LivingWell coach at Delmanor Northtown. “As we age, we may shorten our gait and stop swinging our arms. Poles keep the arms engaged and get more body parts moving.”

Join a class

“Fitness classes for seniors are designed for general fitness but also to challenge our balance, reaction times and coordination,” says Hatch. “It's also great for social engagement,” adds Merritt. “Exercise classes provide opportunities for cognitive stimulation: processing verbal and visual cues help with mind/body connections.”

Buddy up!

One way to have fun while you get fit is to have an exercise buddy. Go for regular walks with a friend, outside when the weather's nice or inside at a mall or track when it's cold or rainy, advises Hatch. “One great idea is to add stand ups — every

time you pass a bench, practice sitting and standing a few times to help strengthen your legs and core.”

Get in the water

“It’s easier to exercise in water as joints become buoyant,” explains Hatch. “It also provides resistance for strength.” If you aren’t a great swimmer, walk in shallow water, use a pool noodle for support or join an aquafit class. Therapeutic pools, which are warmer and shallow, are especially good for those with conditions such as fibromyalgia, arthritis or are recovering from a stroke, adds Hatch.

Wii bowling

This video game exercise platform has lots of subtle benefits, says Merritt. “The action of throwing the bowling ball encourages balance training, weight shifting and hand-eye coordination. But it’s also a great social activity to keep us moving and engaging with others.”

Yoga and tai chi

“These activities bring in the mind-body connection as well as providing balance, strength and flexibility benefits,” says Hatch. Classes designed for seniors are always advisable so that considerations are made for conditions such as lowered bone density and arthritic joints.

Dance!

A great form of exercise that encourages movement and helps balance, dancing is also an excellent social activity, says Hatch. “It’s a good way to enjoy some music and spend time with friends.”

Shuffleboard

Great for social interaction and teamwork, it also helps maintain better posture and balance, says Merritt. “It’s done in an upright position, so it reduces the risk of problems like compression fractures of the spine by encouraging good alignment.” A shuffleboard court can be set up inside so it can be enjoyed all year round.