

Exercising into Your Eighties (and Nineties, and Beyond)

Is it time to start getting more (or for many of us *any* exercise would be an improvement)? That is much easier said than done, but as we age it becomes even more difficult and more vital for our overall well being. Why more important? Exercise is linked to better quality of life, fewer medical complications, and better mood in all ages, but some of the most recent research on exercise and aging has shown the following:

- 1) Regular exercise helps raise the heart rate and reduce the stiffness of the arteries, greatly decreasing one's blood pressure and the risk for heart disease and stroke.
- 2) Regular exercise reduces the risk of Diabetes Mellitus and, for those who have Diabetes Mellitus, helps to keep it better controlled.
- 3) Physical activity may lower the risk of intestinal bleeding in late life by almost half.
- 4) Strength training improves bone strength, balance and muscle strength and mass which have been linked to a lower risk of osteoporosis, falls and fractures.
- 5) Strength training can lessen pain associated with arthritis.
- 6) Even light exercise is associated with reduction in anxiety, stress and depression in older adults.

So why is it so difficult to start and maintain an exercise program as we age? Many of us seem to think that "getting exercise" means having to join a health club, spend a lot of money on new equipment and are fearful of "over doing it" and hurting oneself. However, getting more activity and starting a regular exercise program may be as simple as starting to walk 30 minutes a day several times a week, light arm pumping with weights, and learning some simple stretching exercises and breathing techniques.

There are a few things you want to keep in mind when starting a new exercise program. First, check with your doctor before starting any new strenuous activity. Secondly, start slowly, building up your exercise tolerance gradually. Thirdly, don't hold your breath when you lift or strain, this could cause changes in your blood pressure; make sure to breathe out while contracting the muscle and in when relaxing it. Lastly, make sure to get the proper balance of endurance (also known as cardio) exercise, strength training, balance activities and stretching for flexibility. All of these play an important part in the overall fitness level and maintenance of health. Still hesitant? Ask for help from the experts. Trainers can help develop a good balance of activities and get you started on the path to good health and are available through many health clubs or centers.

So what are you waiting for? It's never too late to get and stay in shape for a better, happier and healthier you. Good Luck!