

Exercise

Exercise in mid-life

Guidelines for 45+ years and those who haven't exercised for some time

This information is a general guide for people over 45 years of age. However, age is only a general guide to fitness training.

As you are probably aware, some 45 year olds look and feel 30, some look and feel 90!



If you are currently exercising, then continue what you are doing. If you are new to exercise, or have an existing medical condition, you should talk your exercise plans through with your GP or health professional before you start.

The key things to consider are:

- The type of exercise you do
- Specific things to consider when you start
- Exercise intensity (how hard), duration (how long) and frequency (how often)
- Making sure you warm up and cool down properly

Type of exercise

While people in mid-life may naturally turn to aerobic type exercises, muscular conditioning (resistance or strength training) and flexibility should not be ignored. Evidence shows that with resistance and flexibility training, muscle mass and strength can be increased, thereby reducing health risks and aiding mobility. There is also some evidence that resistance training can reduce the risk of osteoporosis. In older women, it appears that the loss of bone density associated with menopause can be reduced or even reversed with a resistance-training programme.

Aerobic or endurance conditioning

- Choose an activity you enjoy and which is suitable for your fitness level
- Choose activities that use predominately large muscle groups - activities such as cycling, swimming, walking and cross trainers and rowing machines in the gym are excellent forms of aerobic work
- Ensure that your arms are not above shoulder level for too long if you have high blood pressure or a heart condition
- Avoid fast explosive movements and avoid sudden directional changes - these can cause ligament or tendon injuries
- Keep activities low impact (one foot in contact with the ground at all times) if you have any joint problems. Weight bearing activities are fine, although arthritic conditions may require you to pursue non-weight bearing activities such as swimming or cycling

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Exercise in mid-life contd.

Muscular Conditioning

The American College of Sports Medicine advises a minimum of 8-10 exercises involving the major muscle groups, performing 1-3 sets of 8-12 reps, 2-3 times per week.

- You can use body weight, resistance bands, dumbbells and resistance machines, but always build up how much work you do gradually – this includes the weight you are lifting and the number of sets you do.
- Take 2-3 minutes of rest between sets and between different exercises
- Keep your posture stable
- Breathe in and out with every repetition
- Concentrate on good technique – it is better to keep the weight lower and maintain good technique, rather than use a heavier weight and lose your form
- Ensure you use the correct lifting techniques

Flexibility

- Movement should be slow and controlled both into and out of the stretch
- Be careful with your balance – hold onto something stable if you need support while stretching

Things to consider before you start

Start slowly - listen to your body and your doctor! For moderate intensity endurance exercise, simply go a little further each time you exercise and gradually increase the pace of your exercise as the weeks pass. For strength exercises, lift a weight that you usually lift, but increase the number of times you lift it. Before beginning what you consider to be a more intensive exercise programme, you should see your doctor or health professional for advice.

Consider the impact on your joints and muscles. Some activities, involving jumping or pounding, may be uncomfortable, or have a higher chance of leading to injury. Using a cross trainer, bike, rower or stepper in the gym; or swimming and cycling are all easier on the joints.

Aim for convenience. Some activities require expensive equipment, are seasonal, or require facilities that are not always available in certain locations. Try to avoid these, together with activities that do not fit with your skill base.

The social factor. Exercising with a group, or with a friend can be fun and beneficial. Sometimes exercising with other people is a great help in supporting you to continue with your fitness programme.

Exercise intensity

- Start each session slowly and give yourself time to warm up (five minutes)
- Take each day at a time - judge how you feel and adjust your intensity accordingly
- You should never be in pain, or be unable to speak, during exercise
- You may find it useful to monitor your heart rate. If you are on medications that affect your heart rate, talk to your doctor before you exercise and avoid using heart rate monitors if your medication is likely to affect your readings
- Raise the intensity of your sessions gradually. It is important to build a good base of fitness before you start to work harder.

Duration of exercise

- You may have to start with five minutes at first but plan to gradually progress to at least 20 minutes of continuous exercise each day. 30-45 minutes is ideal.

Number of days per week

- Endurance exercise should be completed three to five days each week. If you do endurance exercise daily, alternate weight bearing activities with non-weight-bearing activities - for example, walk one day, then ride or swim the next day.
- Perform strength exercises on other days to allow the body to rest.

Warm up and cool down

- Always warm up prior to exercise and cool down afterwards
- Begin with rhythmical exercises that involve a long gradual warming up of the body's systems
- Move the joints through a full range of motion, slowly
- Raise the heart rate gradually
- Ensure you cool down gradually at the end of each exercise session
- Ensure that changes in body position are carried out slowly if your exercise regime involves different exercises
- Relaxation is useful, but allow plenty of recovery time