

How to Feel Great at Any Age

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The United States Census projections indicate that the majority of baby boomers will turn 65 years of age between 2010 and 2030. The diversity within this group will range in health and function from extremely fit and healthy to physically dependent.

How a person ages, is to some extent, determined by the cards (genes) they were dealt. But to a larger extent, it may depend upon on how he/she plays those cards. Nature or nurture?

More and more research is showing a strong relationship between living a healthy and active lifestyle and the quantity and quality of life. Proactive steps throughout a lifetime may prevent or delay the advent of frailty.

Is there such a thing as healthy aging? The medical profession continues to make significant strides in saving people from conditions that would have been a cause of death years ago.

The average life expectancy has increased drastically since the 1900's. Yet, with this increase in longevity comes the possibility of living more years with physical limitations and having reduced functional ability. Some studies have discovered that a sizable number of adults over 65 years of age

cannot lift a 10-pound bag of groceries, are unable to walk a mile and getting out of a chair is a difficult task.

Why is having less muscle bad? One reason is that muscle tissue is the furnace that rev's the metabolism. This, in turn, helps to control body weight which may decrease the risk of type II diabetes, hypertension and other disease.

Having strong leg muscles leads to improved balance. Having strong, functional muscles also allows a person to lead a more active and independent lifestyle. Being involved in a sensible, strength-conditioning program can foster improved bone density. "Use it or lose it" applies to muscle strength as well as bone strength.

DESIGNING A FITNESS PROGRAM TO PREVENT FRAILITY

While it's never too late to feel great, it's best to start early. The best solution to frailty is prevention. A sensible exercise program should include:

Range of Motion / Flexibility

A sensible warm up to prepare the body for physical activity should last approximately 5 to 15 minutes and address the major joints. Include gentle activities that foster functional movements such as putting on socks and shoes or getting dressed.

Muscular Strength & Endurance

The goal is to improve muscle function to allow the individual to perform daily activities without fatigue. Exercises should be matched to the activities the person needs to perform such as lifting a milk jug, opening jars, standing from a seated position and being able to walk outside to get the mail.

Cardiorespiratory Fitness

The purpose is to improve one's ability to perform locomotion whether in a wheelchair or walking unassisted. This training component can improve breathing function and assist in reducing cardiovascular diseases, as well as improve body composition. Walking, seated aerobics, peddling a stationary bike—are all options.

Balance & Posture

Aim to improve the muscles that influence posture such as the core, scapular stabilizers and muscles that promote neck alignment. There is evidence that improved posture translates into better balance. Balance activities should include both static and dynamic options.

For more information on how to improve your fitness, check out Dr. Knopf's books published by Ulysses Press.