

# Tips for safe exercise for older adults

**Question:** My friend has been encouraging me to start exercising. I am 72 years old. I want to exercise, but I am having a hard time getting motivated. Do you have information about exercise that is geared toward older adults?

**Answer:** The National Institute on Aging has developed the publication “Exercise: A Guide from the National Institute on Aging.” This is an excellent manual for people who want to take the first step toward an active lifestyle. This publication emphasizes that exercise and proper nutrition are crucial for staying healthy as we age. The publication provides useful tips on establishing and maintaining a regular exercise program. Staying physically active and exercising regularly can help prevent or delay some diseases and disabilities as people grow older.

The publication provides information about four kinds of physical activities that can improve a person’s health and ability: endurance, strength, balance, and flexibility. Endurance exercises increase the breathing and heart rate which improves the health of the heart and lungs and the circulatory system. Endurance exercises may also delay or prevent many diseases associated with aging such as diabetes, colon cancer, heart disease, and stroke. Strength exercises can help you build up muscle, increase your metabolism, and help keep your weight and blood sugar in check. Balance exercises help prevent falls. Falling is a major cause of broken hips and other injuries that often lead to disability and loss of independence. Flexibility exercises help keep your body limber by stretching your muscles and tissues that hold your body’s structures in place.

Taking part in a regular exercise program can help make older adults strong enough to do the things they need to do and like to do. Researchers have found that you don’t have to do strenuous exercises to gain health benefits, moderate exercises are effective too. Studies indicate people who remain physically active have a lower death rate than people who don’t. Researchers have also found exercise can actually improve some chronic conditions in most older people as long as it’s done when the condition is under control. Researchers have also found exercise can help relieve

anxiety and stress by improving mood.

The publication contains information about the benefits of exercise, ideas for maintaining an exercise program, sample exercises, tips for nutrition, and a list of resource organizations. However, whether you are considering joining an exercise program or exercising in the privacy of your own home, always be sure to check first with your doctor before beginning any exercise program. Please call Catholic Charities' Answers for the Aging at 410-646-0100 or 1-888-502-7587 (toll-free in Maryland) if you would like a free copy of this publication or if you would like the number of a senior center near you that may offer a fitness program.