

EXERCISE FOR WOMEN OVER 50

It's important to remain healthy and fit as you get older, not only for your body, but for your mind and your social life. Physical activity is achievable regardless of your lifestyle, mobility, general health and even a slight increase can make a difference to your health and wellbeing.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING ACTIVE?

- Improving life expectancy and quality of life
- Having fun interacting with friends and family
- Helping with mood, especially depression
- Helping maintain a healthy body weight
- Maintaining bone strength and making muscles stronger
- Building confidence and contributing to psychological wellbeing
- Lowering risk of falls and fractures
- Improving heart health
- Managing chronic health problems
- Improving/managing mobility problems

HOW DOES REGULAR EXERCISE EFFECT AGEING?

Regular physical activity not only minimizes the physiological effect of ageing and sedentary lifestyles, but also increases active life expectancy. Significant psychological and cognitive benefits are possible for older adults regularly participating in physical activity.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR EXERCISE

- Check with your doctor
- Start gradually
- Warm up and stretch
- Don't exercise in the heat of the day
- Stay hydrated with water
- Wear comfortable and appropriate footwear for the type of exercise

The known physical benefits of exercise, combined with significant psychological gains, may improve active life expectancy in older adults.

Extra precautions

- If you have been inactive, or are starting exercise for the first time, consult your doctor. Start slowly and build up your activity gently.
- If you have mobility issues or chronic health problems, consult your doctor or specialist. They can recommend ways to work around your health concerns whilst you gain the benefits from regular physical activity.

HEALTH CONCERNS FOR OLDER WOMEN

Bone Health & Menopause

Good bone health is important for all women. Women lay down their peak bone mass during their growing years through regular weight bearing exercises. During the pre and post menopausal years, regular weight bearing exercise will only maintain and preserve bone mass.

Through appropriate training programs involving strength and weight training, bone mass can be maintained and the age-related decline in bone density can be slowed. Such training will also strengthen the body, improve balance, posture and mobility, and therefore reduce the risk of falls and fractures.

Low impact activities such as walking, cycling and swimming have been shown to be less effective in preventing bone loss, especially in post-menopausal women.

Extended periods of bed rest in older women can result in rapid bone loss, which is irreversible.

To maintain bone mass, you need moderate to high intensity and impact loading exercise. Do weight bearing activities 3-5 times a week and resistance exercises 2-3 times a week, at least 30 minutes of a combination of weight bearing activities targeting the major muscle groups.

Weight Bearing Exercise

Weight-bearing means your feet and legs support your body's weight. A few examples of weight-bearing exercise are:

- Brisk or hill walking
- Jogging
- Stair climbing

Resistance Exercise

Resistance means you're working against the weight of another object. Resistance strengthens muscle and builds bone. A few examples of resistance exercise are:

- Free weights or weight machines
- Racquet sports like tennis and squash
- Water exercises

Incontinence / Weak Pelvic Floor

Involuntary urine leakage is experienced by a quarter of women. Regular pelvic floor muscle training has been found to be beneficial for women of all ages, not just those already experiencing the effects of a weak pelvic floor and/or incontinence.

Nutrition

Good nutrition is essential for all ages. A well balanced diet is important for fuelling the body for exercise and daily living. Daily food intake should include foods from each of the five major food groups including dairy products such as milk, cheese and yogurt, as well as iron-rich foods such as red meat, chicken, seafood, spinach, legumes, dried apricots, nuts and seeds.



Iron & Calcium requirements for post-menopausal women

An active woman has increased energy requirements and carbohydrate rich foods are an important source of energy. It is important for all women to get sufficient iron and calcium, the amounts changing with menopause.

Iron	8mg per day	Preferably from haem-iron sources such as beef, chicken and fish	e.g. 70g beef or 60g almonds = 2mg iron 
Calcium	1300mg per day	Preferably from low or reduced fat dairy products and non-dairy foods likes soy, salmon, almonds and spinach	e.g. 1 cup milk or 100g almonds with skin = 300mg 



HOW MUCH ACTIVITY SHOULD YOU DO?

Older women should do at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity on most, if not all days. 30 minutes is needed to keep your heart, lungs, muscles and bones in good working order. But doing any activity is better than no activity. The more you do, the greater health benefits you will gain.

The hardest part is firstly about starting, then about continuing exercise. A good idea is to find a 'health buddy' that has similar goals or someone who can help you stay on track and provide you with motivation i.e. friends, partner, family, or even the dog. You might want to start walking for 10-15 minutes at a time i.e. to a friend's house or to the shops. Gradually build up to 30 minutes.

In addition to moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity, do strength, flexibility and balance activities for further health benefits. Weight bearing exercise will help improve balance, posture and mobility to decrease risk of falls, especially for women with diagnosed osteoporosis.

If you are starting to exercise for the first time, have mobility or chronic health problems, visit your doctor to discuss any risk factors in your taking up an exercise program and how to eliminate or minimise them. Your age, weight, health, ability or experience are not barriers to exercise.

Activities of moderate to vigorous intensity include:

- Brisk walking
- Continuous swimming
- Golf (without the cart)
- Low Impact aerobics
- Cycling
- Tennis
- Water Aerobics
- Dancing
- Washing the car
- Walking the dog
- Gardening
- Mopping and vacuuming

TIP Any exercise that is considered 'weight bearing' is best for maintaining your bone health.

TIP Take a friend and make it fun and rewarding for the both of you.

TIP Reduce your sitting time as much as possible. Limit TV and computer leisure activity to less than two hours per day.

Your health age may be different to your real age – you could be younger or older due to a range of factors, such as your lifestyle and family history. For a quick health age calculator, visit: www.bupa.com.au/health-and-wellness/tools-and-apps/tools-and-calculators/quick-health-age-check

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



Sports Medicine Australia

www.sma.org.au • www.smartplay.com.au
03 9674 8777

Choose Health: Be Active – A physical activity guide for older Australians

www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-physical-choose-health

Osteoporosis Australia

www.osteoporosis.org.au

The Continence Foundation of Australia

www.continence.org.au

Dietitians Association of Australia

www.daa.asn.au

Australian Dietary Guidelines

www.eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines

References

For a full list of references, contact Sports Medicine Australia.

Acknowledgments

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