

SAINT FRANCIS SPORTS MEDICINE

Making athletes of all ages BETTER, STRONGER, FASTER since 1995.

- ⊕ Exercise Offers Mental and Physical Benefits for Older Adults
- ⊕ Take These Simple Steps to Prevent Injury During Exercise

Older Adults Who Exercise Enjoy a Better Quality of Life

Check out any weekend road race or fitness center and you'll see age is nothing more than a state of mind for a significant number of participants. Numerous studies have shown the benefits of regular exercise, and those benefits are at least as important for older adults as young people.

"Exercise isn't just about physical benefits; it also helps your mood and other cognitive functions perform at higher levels," says Steve Logel, PT, physical therapist at Saint Francis Medical Center. "We see active older adults make much faster recoveries from knee and hip replacement surgeries than those who do not exercise regularly."

Researchers have documented that older adults who make exercise a regular part of their daily routine typically experience fewer problems with chronic conditions such as arthritis, diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure. In addition, they exhibit better balance and ease of walking later in life.

Live Life While You're Alive

Exercise and strength training have been shown to reduce instances of osteoporosis and enable older adults to live independently longer than their peers who live a sedentary lifestyle. Preventing loss of bone mass and improving balance results in fewer falls and potentially life-threatening injuries.

"It's never too late to begin an exercise program," Logel says. "Even at very low-impact levels, adults of any age will feel the benefits that come with enhanced balance, strength and stamina."

One of the most underappreciated aspects of regular exercise is the positive effects on mood. Studies show that individuals who suffer from depression – older adults included – report fewer dark periods than those who do not include exercise in their daily routines.

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Start Slowly if Exercise is New for You

The first step in beginning an exercise program is making a commitment to doing something every day. Lifestyle changes can be challenging, especially when they take effort you're not used to giving. Focus on the positive aspects of exercise rather than seeing it as work.

Get medical clearance from your doctor before embarking on a program, especially if you have any pre-existing medical conditions. Your physician will tell you if there are any activities you should avoid.

"Older adults who have not exercised in a while should start very easily, perhaps with an activity as simple as going for a walk or lifting some light arm weights while sitting in a chair," Logel says. "Try not to get discouraged. Enjoy the process and notice the little improvements over time. Your body and mind will thank you."

Listen to your body and pay attention to how it reacts to various activities or effort levels. If a particular activity is causing pain, that's your body telling you to stop. You may need to take a break from that activity or try something else.

Give your body the materials it needs to perform, beginning with plenty of water. Warm up, cool down and do some stretching. Consult a fitness expert for tips if you're not familiar with how to do those types of exercises.

For more information about beginning an exercise program, please call the Sports Medicine team at Saint Francis Medical Center at 573-331-5153.

Minimize Injury Risk by Taking Time to Prepare Your Body to Perform

Of all the strategies and techniques available to minimize injury during exercise, perhaps the most effective are the ones you are most likely to skip.

That's too bad, because a great deal of sports injuries are either preventable or the severity could be minimized if athletes would just take a little extra time to prepare their bodies for high performance.

"Athletes tend to get careless when it comes to some of the basic injury prevention strategies," says Steve Logel, PT, physical therapist at Saint Francis Medical Center. "It can be easy to get caught up in workout planning and forget about the steps you should take in staying healthy."

Warm Up – A proper warm-up routine is the obvious first step toward preparing the body to perform, yet too many athletes gloss over this important part of the workout. The key benefit of warming up is providing the muscles with enough oxygenated blood and nutrients to perform at a high level.

Start easy and gradually work up a sweat before demanding more of your body's resources. Activities as simple as jumping jacks,

jogging and strides will get the heart pumping and the muscles ready for action.

Stretching – Stretching also plays an important role in preparing muscles for the high demands of hard workouts and competition. In addition to the static stretches most athletes are used to doing, try mixing in some dynamic exercises as part of an effective warm-up period.

Most cardio workouts involve straight-ahead movement, which makes it important to introduce additional angles of movement during the warm-up phase. These include exercises such as side lunges, lunges with trunk rotation and standing IT band stretches.

"Taking a few minutes to perform many of the same stretching exercises after your workout will help reduce the aches and pains that come when taxing your body," Logel says. "Besides, increasing your overall flexibility will help you perform better when it counts."

Hydration – Water is the single most important component to physical performance. The effects of dehydration can be catastrophic, since the condition impairs biological function by reducing energy production.

When the body runs low on water, it begins to draw from its reserves. That includes the blood, which would hamper the body's ability to deliver nutrients to the hard-working cells. The bottom line: Stay hydrated all day to put your body in position for optimal performance.

Nutrition – Making sure your body has enough readily accessible energy onboard is an important aspect of injury prevention. This includes glycogen for preworkout energy and protein for postworkout recovery.

While the subject of nutrition and athletics is extensive, suffice to say your body will rebel if you feed it a consistent diet of burgers and fries. An athlete's body burns through a great deal of elemental nutrients, making a high-quality supplement worth considering since it's impossible to restock the shelves through proper diet alone.

Pay special attention to magnesium, which plays a role in hundreds of physiological functions and is susceptible to depletion from intense exercise. Magnesium citrate and magnesium taurate are more bioavailable forms than magnesium oxide, which the body does not absorb well.

Rest days – Even world-class athletes give their bodies a break at least once per week. That's because the recovery phase of working out is critical to preventing injury. In addition to allowing your muscles and other tissues to recover, rest days put you in position for higher quality performance on the other side.

Taking a day off, or at least exercising very easily, is not a sign of weakness; it's a validation that you hold your body in high regard.

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