

## **Seniors and Exercise – A Vital Combination**

As people grow older, exercise is the key to staying strong, energetic and healthy. As we age our body's metabolism naturally slows which is why it is difficult for seniors to maintain a healthy weight.

The answer is exercise.

Because helps speed up the body's metabolism and builds muscle mass, it is easier for seniors to burn calories and maintain a healthy weight. Exercise can also help manage the symptoms of illness and pain and, in some cases, can reverse some of the symptoms of aging. Regular exercise can prevent or at least delay diabetes and heart trouble. It is even possible to reduce arthritis pain with a regular plan of walking. Other benefits of exercise include improved immune function, better blood pressure, better bone density and better digestive functioning. Seniors who exercise regularly also have a lower risk of several chronic conditions including osteoporosis and colon cancer.

But that's only the physical benefits of exercise. Exercise benefits the brain by keeping it active. This prevents or at least slows memory loss, cognitive decline and dementia. It may even slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease! Endorphins produced by exercise can actually help reduce feelings of sadness or depression and can give renewed energy.

Exercise also helps combat insomnia and other sleep disorders, leading to a deeper and better quality sleep. This leads to a refreshed and sharper mind and a more energetic body.

If you are developing an exercise programs for seniors, there are four main types that you should consider.

### **Cardio endurance exercises**

Activities such as walking, swimming or riding a bike can improve the health of heart, lungs and circulatory system. Not only do these exercises increase

breathing and heart rate, they build stamina and staying power. This increased stamina helps some seniors live independently and perform simple life skills such as climbing stairs, cleaning, running errands or grocery shopping.

### **Strength exercises**

Using weights, machines or elastic bands builds muscle, improve balance and help prevent age-related loss of muscle and bone mass. These are critical factors in staying active and avoiding falls. Strength exercises also help alleviate the symptoms of arthritis as well as increasing metabolism and keeping weight and blood sugars in check. Building up strength will help seniors stay independent and make certain day-to-day activities easier, such as opening jars, getting in and out of the car, carry groceries and lifting objects.

### **Balance exercises**

Balance exercises are very important because they can help prevent the most common and most dangerous problem for seniors – falls. In older people, falls are a major cause of broken hips and other injuries that often lead to disabilities and loss of independence. These exercises can range from the very simple – standing on one leg to much more involved exercises like Yoga and Tai Chi.

### **Flexibility Exercises**

Stretches keep the body agile by stretching the muscles and the tissues that hold the body's structures in place. These stretching exercises help increase the range of movement for ordinary physical activities such as looking behind you while driving, tying shoes, shampooing hair and playing with grandchildren.

Aging is inevitable, but some of the things that happen to the body in the aging process can be controlled or even reversed with regular exercise. Whether it's a formal trip to the gym, walking to the bus or the store, vigorously vacuuming or lifting weights, seniors need to get active. What may seem like very small changes resulting from exercise and physical activity can have a big impact, boosting energy and maintaining health, the mind and independence.

When a senior is being looked after by caregivers, it's important that the caregivers understand that they shouldn't do everything. It's not a dereliction of duty to ask a senior (who is capable) to help wash or dry the dishes or to go with them to get the mail. For seniors to age well, they must continue to be active.