

# HEALTH IN OUR HANDS!

The Arkansas State University Wellness Program Newsletter  
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## Healthy Aging

Healthy aging is a hot topic for baby boomers everywhere. Whether concerned about weight gain, sex drive or chronic diseases, the key to healthy aging is a healthy lifestyle. Eating a variety of healthy foods, practicing portion control and including physical activity in a daily routine can go a long way toward promoting healthy aging.

This article will cover physical activity and nutrition. Next month's article will address mental health, social health, and common health concerns of the aging population.

Before changing activity level or diet please consult a physician.

## Physical Activity

As an older adult, regular physical activity is one of the most important things that can be done for health. It can prevent many of the health problems that seem to come with age. It also helps muscles grow stronger so a person can keep doing day-to-day activities without becoming dependent on others.

Not doing any physical activity can be bad, no matter what age or health condition. Some physical activity is better than none at all. Health benefits will also increase with the more physical activity that is done. For those 65 years of age or older, that are generally fit and have no limiting health conditions, following the guidelines listed next is appropriate.

For important health benefits older adults need at least:

- 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity

## Healthy Aging Part 1

(i.e., brisk walking) every week and muscle-strengthening activities on 2 or more days a week that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms).

- 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity (i.e., jogging or running) every week and muscle-strengthening activities on 2 or more days a week that work all major muscle groups.
- An equivalent mix of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity and muscle-strengthening activities on 2 or more days a week that work all major muscle groups.

150 minutes each week sounds like a lot of time, but it's not. That's 2 hours and 30 minutes, about the same amount of time a person might spend watching a movie. The good news is that activity can be spread out during the week, not done all at once. Activity can even be broken up into smaller chunks of time during the day. It's about what works best, as long as activity is done at a moderate or vigorous effort for at least 10 minutes at a time.

For even greater health benefits older adults should increase their activity to:

- 300 minutes each week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity and muscle-strengthening activities on 2 or more days a week that work all major muscle groups.
- 150 minutes each week of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity

and muscle-strengthening activities on 2 or more days a week that work all major muscle groups.

- An equivalent mix of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity and muscle-strengthening activities on 2 or more days a week that work all major muscle groups. More time equals more health benefits.

## What are Physical Activities?

Aerobic activity or "cardio" gets a person breathing harder and their heart beating faster. From pushing a lawn mower, to taking a dance class, to biking to the store – all types of activities count. As long as they're done at a moderate or vigorous intensity for at least 10 minutes at a time. Even something as simple as walking is a great way to get the aerobic activity needed, as long as it's at a moderately intense pace.

Intensity is how hard the body is working during aerobic activity. On a 10-point scale, where sitting is 0 and working as hard as one can is 10, moderate-intensity aerobic activity is a 5 or 6. It will make a person breathe harder and the heart beat faster. At this intensity a person will be able to talk, but not sing the words to a song. Vigorous-intensity activity is a 7 or 8 on this scale. Heart rate will increase quite a bit and breathing will be hard enough so that saying more than a few words without stopping to catch a breath are not possible. Moderate- or vigorous-intensity aerobic activity, or a mix of the two each week, is recommended for healthy aging. A rule of thumb is that 1 minute of vigorous-

intensity activity is about the same as 2 minutes of moderate-intensity activity.

Everyone's fitness level is different. This means that walking may feel like a moderately intense activity to one person, but for another, it may feel vigorous. It all depends on the person- the shape they're in, what they feel comfortable doing, and their health conditions.

Besides aerobic activity, exercises should be done to make the muscles stronger at least 2 days a week. These types of activities will help keep a person from losing muscle as they get older. To gain health benefits, muscle-strengthening activities need to be done to the point where it's hard to do another repetition without help. A repetition is one complete movement of an activity, like lifting a weight or doing one sit-up. Try to do 8-12 repetitions per activity that count as 1 set. Try to do at least 1 set of muscle-strengthening activities, but to gain even more benefits, do 2 or 3 sets. There are many ways to strengthen muscles, whether it's at home or the gym. The activities chosen should work all the major muscle groups of the body (legs, hips, back, chest, abdomen, shoulders, and arms). The following are examples of great strengthening exercises:

- Lifting weights
- Working with resistance bands
- Doing exercises that use your body weight for resistance (pushups, sit ups)
- Heavy gardening (digging, shoveling)
- Yoga

### **Nutrition**

As a person gets older, good nutrition plays an increasingly important role in how well they age. Eating a low-salt, low-fat diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, and fiber can actually reduce their age-related risks of heart disease, diabetes, stroke, osteoporosis, and other chronic diseases. By eating a wide variety of foods, they can pretty easily get what their body needs, including protein, carbohydrates, and fats.

Protein is needed to maintain and rebuild muscles. A person can get low-fat, quality protein from poultry, fish, eggs or egg substitutes, soy, and limited amounts of nuts and low-fat meat and dairy.

Carbohydrate is the body's preferred source of energy. There are two main sources of dietary carbohydrates: simple sugars, such as sucrose (the refined white sugar added to sweets and desserts), fructose (the sugar contained in fruit) and lactose (milk sugar); and complex carbohydrates, which come from vegetables and grains. Unlike refined sugars, fruits contain vitamins and fiber, dairy products contain nutrients such as calcium and vitamin D, and complex carbohydrates contain vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Most carbohydrate calories should be from vegetables, grains, and fruits. Limiting drinks and foods with added sugar and trying to replace fat calories with complex carbohydrates is important in a healthy diet.

Fat also provides energy. To help keep blood cholesterol levels low, limited fat intake should be from the "good" fats which include polyunsaturated fats (as in liquid corn oil or soybean oil) and monounsaturated fats (in olive oil, avocados, and nuts). Limiting saturated fats (beef, pork, veal, butter, shortening, and cheese) can be accomplished by eating these foods less often, having smaller servings, choosing less fatty cuts of meat, and by using stronger tasting cheeses so you can use just a little and still get the cheese flavor. Try to avoid the trans fats found in stick margarine and in many processed foods such as crackers and cookies.

When reviewing a diet the following concepts should be taken into account as we age:

The body's daily energy needs slowly decrease. Fewer calories a day are needed as compared to younger populations. A doctor or a registered dietitian (RD) can help calculate a person's ideal calorie intake.

Natural hormone changes make the body prone to depositing more body fat (especially around the middle) and less muscle.

Eating a healthy, balanced diet and limiting intake of saturated fat, along with increased activity and muscle strengthening, can aid in maintaining a healthy weight.

A person's bones lose mineral content more rapidly than before, especially if they are a postmenopausal woman, because having less estrogen increases bone loss. As a result, calcium and vitamin D should be present in a diet to help prevent osteoporosis.

Plaque buildup (atherosclerosis) can naturally occur on the inside of the arteries that supply blood to the heart and brain. Plaque buildup can be slowed by eating heart-healthy foods such as lean meats, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. A healthy diet can also help lower cholesterol, high blood pressure, and prevent heart disease and stroke.

### **References**

- <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/healthy-aging/MY00374>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/aging/>
- <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/category/healthyaging.html>
- <http://www.healthyagingprograms.com/content.asp?sectionid=73&ElementID=144>

### **Events:**

- September 10,2011 ASU PTSA Fit-4-Life 5k

\*\*If you have any suggestions for newsletter topics, please contact Dean Susan Hanrahan at [hanrahan@astate.edu](mailto:hanrahan@astate.edu).  
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The Arkansas State University Employee Wellness Newsletter is published monthly during the academic year by the College of Nursing and Health Professions. Health questions can be addressed to Dean Susan Hanrahan, Ph.D., ext. 3112 or [hanrahan@astate.edu](mailto:hanrahan@astate.edu). Produced by Helen Grimes, graduate student in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, Physical Therapy Program.