Physical Activity

Physical activity is a key contributor to lifelong independence and wellbeing.

Frailty and loss in strength, flexibility and function commonly associated with ageing are often due to disuse rather than the actual ageing process.

Physical activity is the single most important remedy to countering disuse. It provides the individual with the power to positively influence their own health and functional abilities as they age.

**Benefits of physical activity for over 50s**

Regular participation in physical activity offers a wide range of benefits.

**Physical benefits:**
- Improves/maintains mobility, flexibility and functional ability
- Improves/maintains muscle strength which assists in the maintenance of balance thus helping to prevent falls. Maintenance of strength also allows the mature aged person to continue to conduct everyday activities such as getting up from a sitting position or carrying groceries
- Helps maintain bone strength, reducing the likelihood of fractures and helping in the prevention and management of osteoporosis
- Improves/maintains cardio-respiratory function, endurance and stamina which results in increased energy levels
- Improves metabolic fitness, aiding in weight control
- Assists in the regulation of blood pressure.
- Helps in the prevention of cardiovascular disease, cancer and type-2 diabetes
- Aids in the management of arthritis

**Mental benefits:**
- Reduction in the symptoms of anxiety and depression and enhancement in the sense of wellbeing
- Improvement of sleep
- Increase in self-confidence and self-esteem.

**Social benefits:**

Participating in a group setting can put people in touch with their local community and broaden their networks, thus reducing social isolation and increasing community connectedness.

**How much physical activity is enough?**

Many people think it is just too difficult to be physically active, believing that a major time commitment and vigorous physical activity is required for it to be worthwhile. However, it takes only 30 minutes a day of *moderate* physical activity to experience the many benefits. Furthermore, this needs not be continuous and instead may be spread over three 10-minute sessions per day.

*Moderate refers to physical activity at a level that causes your heart to beat faster and some shortness of breath, but that you can still talk comfortably while doing.*

**National Physical Activity Guidelines**

The National Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults were produced to encourage and help Australians to become more physically active. The guidelines highlight four specific points:
- Think of movement as an opportunity not an inconvenience
- Be active every day in as many ways as you can
- Put together at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days
- If you can, also enjoy some regular vigorous exercise for extra health and fitness.

The `Recommendations on physical activity for health for older Australians`, based on the national guidelines mentioned above, point out a number of ways to get enough physical activity. These include:
- incidental activities during our daily routines (e.g. walking to local shops instead of driving, gardening / raking leaves)
- leisure pursuits such as golf, lawns bowls, bocce, various types of dancing, woodwork
structured activities, e.g. walking groups, tai chi
physical activity supervised by a physiotherapist
or exercise physiologist (recommended for those
with a moderate health problem, at least when
starting out).

There are three main categories of physical activity:
endurance / fitness activities (emphasis on
increasing the demand on the heart and lungs):
brisk walking / jogging, bicycle riding, swimming,
etc.
strength training activities (emphasis on building
muscle strength): resistance exercise, lifting
weights, and stair climbing
balance, mobility and flexibility (stretching)
activities (emphasis on balance, walking, turning,
going up and down steps, muscle flexibility and
other mobility-related functions.

Greater benefits are likely to be achieved if a mixed
range of physical activity options are taken. The
variety of types of physical activity can also increase
motivation. Indoor and outdoor physical activities
might be included. When choosing physical activity
types consider what benefits you want to achieve,
what you enjoy doing, and what options are available
for you.

More ways to be physically active
There are many opportunities for participation in
physical activity as part of the many groups,
organisations and clubs that can be found
throughout the community. For example, walking
remains the most popular activity for older people.
Types of local walking groups range from bush
walking to mall walking, suitng every taste and
fitness level.
Many recreation and fitness centres have programs
catering specifically for the mature age client. Local
community centres, sporting clubs and seniors clubs
also offer a wide variety of activities.

Now is the time
It is never too late to start moving it...
anyone at
any age can reap the physical, social and mental
benefits of regular, moderate physical activity.
It is advised that you check with your local GP prior
to commencing any new physical activity or if you
have stopped physical activity because of a new
health issue and wish to resume it.

Useful contacts and resources
Your local council’s community information service is
a great point of contact to find out what
opportunities for physical activity are available in
your area.

Active Ageing Australia is a not-for-profit
organisation offering programs and resources to help
you become more active, including ‘5 for 10’
introductory recreational sport programs, home
exercise DVDs and other ideas on how to keep
active. Tel. 8362 5599
www.activeageingaustralia.com.au

COTA SA’s Strength for Life promotes health and
wellbeing amongst people over 50 through strength
training programs run by accredited fitness providers.
For more information or to locate a participating
fitness centre tel. 8232 0422, 1800 182 324 (SA
country callers) or visit www.cotasa.org.au

Heart Foundation coordinates a walking program
with groups operating across the state.
For more information or to locate a walking group,
tel. 8224 2888 or visit www.heartfoundation.com.au

Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA)
publishes a guide on physical activity for older
Australians titled Choose Health: Be Active – A
physical activity guide for older Australians. An
electronic version is available from DoHA’s website.
Hard copies can be obtained by calling
1800 500 853. Alternatively contact Seniors
Information Service (tel. 8168 8776, country callers
1800 636 368).

Exercise is Medicine - Australia is an initiative of
Exercise & Sports Science Australia (ESSA) focused
on encouraging health care providers to review and
assess every patient’s physical activity levels at every
visit. Its website includes fact sheets on exercises
and a range of conditions.
http://exerciseismedicine.org.au

The information contained here is general in nature
and is not intended as medical advice