The Fountain of Youth

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We all know we should exercise routinely. Regular exercise enhances muscle and joint function and decreases risk of heart attack and stroke. In women, regular exercise can decrease the risk of osteoporotic fractures. Additionally, regular exercise decreases stress and releases endorphins, natural chemicals that give us a sense of well-being.

Regular exercise is a veritable fountain of youth. But how can we who are past our physical prime drink from this fountain without choking, or worse, drowning? Here are a few tips.

- Listen to your body. As you age, you may find that you are not as flexible as you once were or that you cannot tolerate the same types of activities that you did years ago. Don’t let this discourage you from starting a new exercise routine. Just modify your activities to accommodate your body's new limitations.
- Consider taking lessons or using a personal trainer when starting a new exercise program. Whether you're a beginner or have been playing a sport for a long time, lessons can be a worthwhile investment. Proper form and instruction reduce the chance of injury.
- Develop a balanced fitness program that incorporates cardiovascular exercise, strength training and flexibility. A personal trainer can help with this. In addition to providing a total body workout, a balanced program will keep you from getting bored and lessen your chances of injury.
- Add activities and new exercises systematically. No matter if you've been sedentary or are in good physical shape, don't try to take on too many activities at one time. It's best to add no more than one or two new activities per workout.
- Use the 10 percent rule. When changing your activity level, increase it in increments of no more than 10 percent per week. If you normally walk or run 2 miles a day and want to increase to, say, 4 miles, slowly
build up distance each week until you reach your goal. Also use the 10 percent rule as your guide for strength training.

- Always take time to warm up and stretch before physical activity. Research has shown that cold muscles are more prone to injury. Warm up with jumping jacks, stationary cycling or running or walking in place for 3 to 5 minutes. Then slowly and gently stretch, holding each stretch for 30 seconds.
- Be careful not to succumb to the "weekend warrior" syndrome. Compressing physical activity into two days sets you up for trouble and does not increase your fitness level. Try to get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity every other day.
- Invest in good equipment. You certainly don’t need to over-buy, but you shouldn’t be playing tennis with that old wooden racquet, either. Be sure to select the proper shoes for your sport and use them only for that sport. When the treads start to look worn or the shoes are no longer supportive, replace them.
- If you have or have had a sports or orthopaedic injury like tendinitis, cartilage or ligament injury, or stress fracture, consult an orthopaedic surgeon who can help you recover and prevent future injuries.
- Above all else, HAVE FUN!