

# Staying Active

## A Guide for Individuals over 50

### INTRODUCTION

Getting older doesn't have to mean giving up activities we enjoy. Although some changes in our bodies naturally occur due to the aging process, we *can* do some things to prolong our good health and prevent loss of function. This guide will provide you with some information which is intended to encourage you to stay and/or become more physically active.

We will discuss the benefits of exercise as they affect different parts and systems within our bodies. We will show you that a lack of exercise is not healthy. This guide will help you begin to become more physically active and will provide you with some helpful hints and safety advice. You will learn about various types of exercise and their benefits. We hope this guide will be just the beginning in your quest to become more physically active, regardless of your age.

This guide is intended to be distributed as part of a communications plan developed by the Wisconsin Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, Inc. It has been written by Argus Rehab, Inc., of Mequon, Wisconsin. This booklet should accompany an educational program to be presented by qualified rehabilitation or fitness personnel. We do not advocate your initiating an exercise program based solely upon the information contained within. Always obtain medical clearance and proper hands-on training before initiating any exercise program or radically increasing your current activities.

# WHY EXERCISE?

## Benefits of Staying Active vs. Risks of Inactivity

Staying active provides numerous benefits to our entire body and overall health. Inactivity can shorten our life span and make our later years less enjoyable. This section will explore just how exercise can benefit various areas, and will warn of dangers that may arise by not exercising.

### Heart, Lungs, and Blood

#### The Heart

Your heart is the most important muscle in your body. It is responsible for pumping nourishment and oxygen to all parts of the body, including your brain. As we age, our bodies become less adept at utilizing oxygen during strenuous exercise. This is why we often cannot work as hard for as long. This is most commonly related to declining heart function, but can also be related to a respiratory condition. Aging also is associated with an increase in our systolic blood pressure (the pressure exerted during the heart's contraction).

Regular exercise increases the size and strength of the heart, thus lowering our blood pressure. It also increases the blood supply to the heart itself, so our hearts don't have to work as hard. Our resting pulses drop with regular exercise. Exercise causes blood to flow more freely, keeps our veins and arteries open, and brings more nourishment (including oxygen) to the rest of the body. Improved blood flow to our whole body keeps us warmer in winter. Medical research tells us that persons who are active have fewer heart attacks than those who lead a sedentary life. If active persons do have heart attacks, they tend to recover more quickly. Exercise reduces our risks of heart disease, including strokes, hypertension, atherosclerosis ("hardening of the arteries"), and heart attacks.

## The Lungs

As we get older, there is a decrease in our *vital capacity*. This is the amount of air we can expel with one forced breath after inhaling deeply. It is related to the ability of our bodies to utilize oxygen efficiently. In addition, with the aging process, our lungs and connective tissues become less elastic. Our respiratory muscles typically weaken and shorten. These factors can contribute to our feeling “winded” after relatively little exertion. Regular physical exercise can help improve the flexibility of the breathing muscles, make our oxygen usage more efficient, and provide us with higher energy and more endurance. We can then enjoy the activities we like for longer and with less effort.

## The Blood

With regular exercise, we benefit by an overall increase in total blood volume and red blood cell count. Therefore, more oxygen can be carried to all of our cells, including our muscle cells. Muscles can then extract the oxygen and use it more efficiently.

Coronary artery disease is the leading cause of heart disease and heart attacks in the United States. By exercising regularly and avoiding fatty foods, you can help lower your risks. Exercise decreases the blood’s cholesterol content and its triglycerides. When these fatty substances are decreased, we become less prone to develop blood clots. The walls of our arteries become less susceptible to the build-up of fatty plaques that can interfere with circulation and cause strokes or heart attacks. One type of cholesterol, HDL, or high density lipoprotein, is known as the “good” cholesterol, because it seems to protect us from heart disease. Exercise increases the levels of HDL in our blood.

It has even been suggested, in some studies of people over 60, that exercising regularly can increase levels of a substance in the blood which is responsible for breaking up blood clots. Blood clots are often responsible for strokes and heart attacks.

## **Muscles, Bones, and Joints**

If you’ve ever had your arm or leg in a cast for an extended period of time, you know what happens to muscles that aren’t used regularly. Inactivity causes muscles to atrophy -- the tissue shrinks and loses strength. Getting those muscles back into shape probably took you some time and effort. Imagine the benefits you will enjoy by not allowing your muscles to atrophy in the first place. However, neglected old muscles *can* be revitalized with exercise, so don’t worry if you’ve spent too much time on the couch for the past few years. It’s never too late!

Exercise can help strengthen tendons (which attach muscles to bones) and ligaments (which attach bones to bones). In this way, it *stabilizes* our joints. Stability allows us to have better unrestricted movement and lowers our risks of accidental injury. As joints become more flexible, pain is reduced. Exercise helps us cope with lower back pain, arthritis, and other musculoskeletal complaints, and improves our posture.

A common ailment that affects many older individuals, especially women, is osteoporosis. With osteoporosis, our bone material thins, becoming brittle and prone to fractures. In fact, 1 out of every 2 women over age 75 sustains at least one broken bone associated with osteoporosis. By exercising, we can fight the onset of this debilitating disease and can actually help rebuild tissue that has already begun to thin. Weight-bearing exercise is especially helpful for building up spinal and leg bones. Upper body work should also be undertaken to enhance bone material in the arms and shoulders.

Staying active is extremely important for keeping our muscles, bones, and joints healthy. We want to be able to continue to get in and out of cars, carry groceries and grandchildren, and move about without pain. You can just about guarantee that a life of inactivity will result in compromised ability to do the things we like when we get older. But, remember, it is never too late to change -- we'll talk about how to get started later on.

### ***Exercise improves:***

- ⇒ ***Endurance***
- ⇒ ***Flexibility***
- ⇒ ***Strength***
- ⇒ ***Balance***
- ⇒ ***Agility***
- ⇒ ***Coordination***
- ⇒ ***Range of Motion***
- ⇒ ***Reaction Time***

*Just imagine how improvements in these areas will help you maintain your independence and enjoyment of activities! Maintaining and/or developing these strengths can help you continue driving, walking short and long distances, carrying items, getting up and down, working in the kitchen, garage, and garden, and avoiding falls, to name a few.*

## Weight Control

Probably all of us at some point have said “I’m going on a diet!”. Our “battle of the bulge” seems to be a national pastime, with most Americans wishing they didn’t weigh quite so much. Consequently, there are lots of diet plans and “miracle weight loss cures” available to us. Some diets can be quite effective, while others are worthless. Regardless of the legitimacy of various diet claims, you can be assured of one thing: ***Regular exercise is essential to making any diet successful in the long run.*** Sure, some diets may help you lose weight at first, but exercise will help you *keep* off the pounds

As we get older, our caloric needs may decrease by anywhere from 2 to 10 percent for each decade after age 20. However, most of us don’t decrease our intake accordingly. Exercise is necessary to burn off the extra calories if we wish to keep our intakes at the higher levels.

How does exercise help us lose weight? It raises our basal metabolic rate, which means that our bodies begin to burn calories more quickly, even when we are resting. Exercise reduces the amount of fat and increases the amount of muscle in our bodies. Muscle tissue uses calories at a higher rate than fat. An adequately muscular body looks better and is healthier than an over-fat body.

Regardless of the “diet” plan you may wish to use, here are some factors you should remember. When we set a goal of losing weight, we want to lose *fat*, not active tissue like muscles, bones, glands, and organs.

### To lose fat:

1. You need good nutrition -- lots of fruits/vegetables, low fat, etc.
2. Remember that only *aerobic* exercise burns fat
3. You need to engage in aerobic exercise at least 4 times per week. Three times a week is necessary to improve heart, lung, and vascular functioning.
4. Aerobic exercise should continue non-stop at least 45 minutes each time.

## **Mental and Emotional Health**

Exercise relaxes tight muscles that can accompany stress. It has also been suggested that exercise stimulates the release of certain brain chemicals known as *endorphins*. These chemicals have the effect of bringing about a feeling of well-being, almost like a sense of euphoria during exercise. (Some people speak of “runner’s high” with regard to this phenomenon.)

Most experts agree that exercise is useful in fighting depression. It can relieve insomnia and irritability. Improved physical fitness promotes optimism, enhances your self-confidence, and improves your self-image. The social outlet involved with many forms of exercise is also important. The high point of the day for many older persons is aerobics class, meeting their friends for a walk, or attending Tuesday morning bowling, to name a few.

## **General Physical Well-Being**

Physical exercise can provide us with general health benefits in addition to those discussed previously. There is some research to suggest that regular exercise may help protect us from certain forms of cancer, especially breast and colon cancer. It plays a major role in the prevention and treatment of adult-onset diabetes. Regular exercise improves digestion and acts as a natural laxative to keep us regular. In general, the more physically fit we are, the better operative risk we are if we ever need surgery. It is important to stay active in order to keep our bodies in good shape overall.

## **Responsibility and Independence**

If by now you haven’t considered a more active lifestyle in order to benefit yourself, why not consider how your improved physical fitness will benefit others? Your loved ones will appreciate the efforts you are taking to prolong your healthy life. You will enjoy participating in their lives for longer than if you remain sedentary and engage in unhealthy behaviors. We all want to see our grandchildren grow up, don’t we?

Another benefit to staying healthy is lower medical costs. Healthy, fit people don’t need to see the doctor as often. By prolonging your ability to live independently and care for yourself you avoid or delay the need for others to care for you in a nursing home or other health care facility. Don’t we all have a responsibility to do what we can to maintain our bodies?

# HOW TO GET STARTED

## Benefits of Starting an Exercise Program, at Any Age

“I’m just too old and tired to get into shape. It would never make a difference at this point.” Do you find yourself thinking along these lines? It may seem overwhelming at first, but you *can* experience beneficial effects from becoming more physically active at *any* point in your life.

Nearly thirty years ago some researchers wanted to see if it really would make a difference to older adults if they became more active. Herbert de Vries, Ph.D. and Gene Adams, Ph.D.. obtained a grant from the U.S. Administration on Aging to study exercise and older persons. They used subjects at a retirement community in Laguna Hills, California, and their initial study spanned four years. They wanted to answer these questions: If you had never exercised in your whole life, could you start at 70 or 80? Could exercise improve people’s physical conditions such as blood pressure, resting heart rate, amount of body fat, and sleep patterns?

The people who participated in this study were 56 to 87 years old. After initiating programs of physical activity and exercise, notable changes were evident in the subjects after only 6 weeks! Lower blood pressures, lower body fat percentages, improved maximum oxygen capacities, and improved arm strength were some of the benefits they realized. Of interest, the people who improved the most were those that were the most out of shape to begin with. Many other studies of exercise in older persons have found similar results: **It’s never too late to become more active!**

## Check With Your Doctor

We have discussed how important it is to become more physically active, at any age. However, *it is imperative that you obtain medical clearance from your physician before undertaking any exercise program.* This resource was designed to provide general information about staying active, and does not take the place of an exercise program designed with your particular needs in mind.

You will want to reduce your risk of encountering an unexpected health problem or injury by getting proper medical clearance before you start exercising. Your doctor may wish to use tests to see how exercise might affect you, in order to make sure an exercise program is appropriate. In addition, your M.D. can assist you in selecting activities appropriate for you based on other health factors. For instance, special instructions may be indicated for persons with diabetes, asthma or other respiratory conditions, high blood pressure, heart conditions, arthritis, or other medical conditions. At this doctor visit you may wish to have him or her assess any particular complaints of pain or problem areas, as well.

**Be sure to ask your doctor for exercise guidelines  
and follow his or her advice carefully.**

Working with your doctor will help you:

- 1) Find the most beneficial exercise for you
- 2) Prevent accidental injuries

## **Start Slow**

One of the easiest ways to *sabotage* your efforts to increase your physical activity is to jump into it full-force, expecting to run marathons and hike Mount Everest by your second week. You will quickly become discouraged and may probably quit altogether if you set your goals too high.

Especially if you have been relatively inactive for some time, you will want to start out slowly. Gradually increase the length and intensity of your workouts as your body adjusts. For instance, if you can easily complete a two-mile walk, try for three miles next time. Let your body tell you when to move up to the next higher step, or follow a carefully planned program developed by your doctor or exercise specialist.

Being active does not necessarily mean you must participate in highly athletic and exhaustive pursuits. We can improve our overall physical fitness just by giving up a sedentary lifestyle for one that is moderately active. You may wish to start out by identifying an activity you once liked but no longer participate in, or by increasing your involvement with a current activity. Or, you may find it interesting and motivating to try something altogether new. The activity doesn't have to be physically demanding, but it must be fun and enjoyable for you. Taking part in an activity may be more motivating and interesting if you do it with a friend or spouse.

### Ideas for Leisure Activities

- Walking (outdoors, at a local mall or recreational center, etc.)
- Bicycling
- Swimming (walking in the pool, water aerobics, etc.)
- Dancing (Ballroom, Ballet, Folk, Square, Line, Etc.)
- Golf (walk the course)
- Hiking
- Gardening
- Lawn Care (raking leaves, light shoveling or sweeping, etc.)
- Carpentry
- Badminton
- Tennis
- Playing Catch
- Collecting items for craft projects or hobbies (nature items, antiques, etc.) that require some effort (walking, hunting) to obtain
- Window Shopping
- Bird or wildlife watching or photography
- Bowling, darts, pool

**These are just a few suggestions to help you get started. As you can see, becoming more active does not have to involve strenuous physical exercise. Pick something fun and “just do it”!**

## **Environment**

Some individuals will choose to participate in their exercise program at a fitness center, while others may furnish their homes with selected pieces of exercise equipment. Regardless, the space in which you exercise is important for many reasons. Safety and comfort should be your goals in selecting your work out area. It should also be a pleasant place, so you will be more motivated to go there.

### **Fitness Center Tips**

If a fitness center is your choice, you should look for several features. First of all, look for a club with qualified, certified fitness personnel. Some professional agencies that certify fitness personnel include: the Aerobics and Fitness Association of America (AFAA), the American Council on Exercise (ACE) or the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM). Make sure your fitness center employs certified instructors. In addition, *all* legitimate fitness professionals should be trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Look for instructors who have completed specialized training to deal with the needs of older adults.

Secondly, look at the physical layout and atmosphere. A floor surface that is supportive but with some give (wood versus concrete) is ideal. The facility should be clean and odor free (pay particular attention to locker room areas). The facility should be easily accessible and in good overall repair.

A disadvantage to fitness centers may be the cost -- many of them have “start-up” or initiation fees and monthly fees of thirty dollars or more. Some fitness centers offer discounted memberships to persons who use them at off-peak times (approx. 9 to 3 weekdays). Perhaps a senior citizen discount may apply. Some insurance plans and employers are beginning to cover some of the costs of fitness center membership. There are some fitness centers that provide membership benefits in exchange for your help with various tasks -- answering phones, handing out towels, simple clerical duties, etc. Shop around and don’t be afraid to approach the manager with your particular needs -- you may be able to negotiate your membership costs.

If you choose to participate in aerobics or dance classes, make sure the room is well-lighted and that you can easily see and hear the instructor from anywhere in the room. Listen to the acoustics during a class -- if it’s too noisy or echoes too much you may have trouble hearing the instructor’s guidelines. If you use exercise equipment (weight machines, exercise bikes, rowing machines, etc.) make sure the room is large enough to accommodate all the equipment. Pieces should be positioned so as to reduce the risk of

tripping over them or bumping your head on them. Look for well-maintained machines with no loose parts, weakened or frayed cables, or ripped upholstery.

## **Exercising at Home**

- If you decide to work out at home, after consulting with your physician and determining which kinds of equipment are recommended, here are some tips:
- Keep the temperature between about 68 and 72 degrees Fahrenheit
- If exercising outdoors, be careful in extreme heat or cold. As we age, our bodies become more susceptible to hypothermia and hyperthermia.
- As the humidity increases we need to decrease our duration and intensity of exercise.
- Limit your exposure to the cold. Cold can cause your blood vessels to constrict, which, combined with high blood pressure, can strain your cardiovascular system.
- If you live alone, try to let a friend know of your general exercise schedule and routes for safety's sake. You may want to make a check-in call after your exercise ("I'm home from my walk now and I'm OK"). Just make sure someone knows where to look for you if you would run into trouble.
- Avoid doing heavy exercise without someone nearby. Keep a telephone or "Lifeline"-type device handy when you exercise at home.

It is important to keep our bodies adequately hydrated. Drink lots of water before, during, and after exercise. There are many types of water bottles available designed especially for athletes. Some water bottles can be placed in specially-designed pouches that fasten onto your belt or fanny pack.

<b>Proper Exercise Clothing</b>
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1. In general, dress in porous, clothing that allows perspiration to evaporate. Especially on hot days, make sure your clothing does not trap moisture.
2. If you exercise outdoors in the cold, wear several layers of lightweight clothes that can be removed as you warm up.
3. Loose-fitting outfits are best. Your clothes should never impede movement.
4. Invest in a sturdy pair of supportive shoes with good cushioning and strong arch supports. Shop at an athletics department.
5. If urinary accidents are a problem for you during exercise, see your doctor for possible medications or exercises. There are a variety of discrete incontinence products currently available as well.

### Exercise Warning Signals

#### ***IMMEDIATELY STOP EXERCISING IF YOU:***

- > **FEEL FAINT, LIGHTEADED, OR DIZZY**
- > **FEEL QUEASY OR NAUSEOUS**
- > **FEEL SHAKY**
- > **EXPERIENCE EXTREME SHORTNESS OF BREATH**
- > **EXPERIENCE CHEST PAIN**
- > **EXPERIENCE PAIN IN ARMS, JAWS, TEETH, OR EARS**
- > **EXPERIENCE A LOSS OF COORDINATION**
- > **EXPERIENCE A DRAMATIC CHANGE IN HEART RATE**
- > **STILL HAVE A PULSE OF OVER 120 BEATS PER MINUTE, OVER FIVE MINUTES AFTER YOU'VE STOPPED EXERCISING**

Don't push yourself in your exercise attempts. You should be able to carry on a conversation in your normal tone of voice while exercising.

# TYPES OF EXERCISE

## Aerobic

The American Heart Association describes aerobic exercise as the best form of exercise for mature adults. Aerobic exercise is also known as endurance exercise. It strengthens our hearts, lungs, and circulatory systems.

**True aerobic exercise must be rhythmical, continuous, and sustained for at least 20 minutes, three times per week, in order to produce benefits.**

Some examples of aerobic exercise include biking, walking, and swimming. Aerobic exercise may not be indicated for persons with asthma.

### **How to Determine Your Heart-Rate Training Zone**

Your *heart-rate training zone* sets a range of acceptable heartbeats per minute during aerobic exercise. A popular way to calculate this is based on the theory that the average fastest human heartbeat is 220 beats per minute. As the body ages, the heart rate decreases by about one beat per year. You would subtract your age from 220 to determine your own *personal maximum heart rate*. In order for you to benefit from aerobic exercise, your heart rate should reach at least 60 percent, but no more than 85 percent of your maximum heart rate during the most strenuous portion of your aerobic workout. This range, your *heart-rate training zone*, should be your goal.

Here's how to calculate your *personal heart-rate training zone*:

**Subtract your age from 220  
to determine your *personal maximum heart rate***

**Multiply your maximum heart rate by 60 percent  
to establish your *minimum training zone heart rate***

**Multiply your maximum heart rate by 85 percent  
to establish your *maximum training zone heart rate***

## EXAMPLE FOR DETERMINING YOUR HEART-RATE TRAINING ZONE

Here's how "Joe," a 65-year old, would calculate his personal heart rate training zone:

$$\begin{array}{r} 220 \text{ Maximum Heart Rate (average)} \\ -65 \text{ Joe's age} \\ \hline 155 \text{ Joe's Personal Maximum Heart Rate} \end{array}$$

The heart rate should reach at least 60 percent of the personal maximum heart rate, so we multiply 155 (Joe's Personal Maximum Heart Rate) by 60 percent.

$$\begin{array}{r} 155 \text{ Joe's Personal Maximum Heart Rate} \\ \times .60 \text{ Multiplier for determining minimum training zone} \\ \hline 93 \text{ Joe's Personal Minimum training zone heart rate} \end{array}$$

Your heart rate should not exceed 85 percent of your Personal Maximum Heart Rate, so we multiply the Personal Maximum Heart Rate (155 in this case) by 85 percent

$$\begin{array}{r} 155 \text{ Joe's Personal Maximum Heart Rate} \\ \times .85 \text{ Multiplier for determining Maximum training zone} \\ \hline 132 \text{ Joe's Maximum training zone number} \end{array}$$

In this example, we determined that Joe should strive for a heart rate of between 93 and 132 beats per minute during the working phase of his exercise session in order to benefit from his aerobic exercise.

### How to Check Your Heart Rate

- Your wrist is a good place to take your pulse.
- Turn your hand palm side up and place fingertips of other hand on the thumb side of the wrist. Roll your fingers slightly until you feel a pulsation.
- Count the number of beats you feel in 15 seconds.
- Multiply this number by 4, as there are 4 15-second intervals in one minute.
- This total is your heart rate

### Three Necessary Phases of Aerobic Exercise

### 1) Warm-up

Most of our body's blood rests in the torso near vital organs. When we exercise, the blood must shift to the working areas of the body. The circulatory system needs a little time to start sending blood and oxygen to the large muscle groups. This is why it is important to start out slowly for about 5 minutes. Take your pulse before accelerating to make sure it is in the lowest part of your personal heart rate training zone.

### 2) Working

The "working" portion of our aerobic exercise is when we sustain our heart rate within our recommended training zone for a goal of at least 20 minutes. Any rhythmic activity like brisk walking, biking, swimming, rowing, hiking, etc. qualifies as a working component. You may wish to start out with a goal of 10 minutes, and gradually work up to 20 or more minutes.

### 3) Cool Down

During this stage, we slow the pace of our aerobic activity to allow our blood flow to gradually return to normal. This stage should last about 5 minutes.

## **Calisthenics -- Muscle Conditioning**

This type of exercise increases strength and endurance. In the elderly, accidents are the sixth leading cause of death, and most accidents are falls. Many falls are caused by a lack of balance. Balance is dependent upon strength and flexibility. Falls can be prevented by keeping your muscles in shape. In addition to preventing falls, good muscle tone and strength are needed for preserving our ability to walk, stand, carry items, bend, and get in and out of cars and up from chairs.

Calisthenics or muscle conditioning is frequently accomplished by lifting weights. However, lifting free weights (dumbbells, barbells, etc.) is not recommended for most older adults for several reasons:

- a. Heavy weight work can increase blood pressure significantly
- b. It can increase intracranial pressure (possibly leading to stroke)
- c. It can cause more injuries

Good alternatives to free weights include resistance-based exercise equipment such as Nautilus. With these pieces of equipment one can easily adjust the intensity, and obtain a broader range of motion. In addition, very specific muscle groups can be targeted (or avoided).

Most older people will benefit from relatively low-weight, but high-repetition exercise. For instance 20 repetitions of a 1 pound weight is more beneficial at increasing muscle endurance than 1 repetition of a 20 pound weight.

You should start with a low weight and do repetitions until the muscle just feels tired. Don't work it until you feel pain. Your weights are too heavy if your workout leaves you drained, causes unpleasant pulling sensations in muscles, or results in sore, achy joints. The order in which you work your muscles isn't crucial. It is important, however, to warm up and cool down as you would with any other type of exercise. The optimal weight-training program would take place 3 days per week, spaced out.

**It is extremely important that you consult your physician prior to undertaking a weight-training program. Use a qualified fitness instructor to assist you with setting up a program.**

## **Stretching**

The flexibility of our joints is referred to as *range of motion*. As we age, the tissues around our joints tend to thicken and lose flexibility. The muscles may grow shorter. Our range of motion then decreases, limiting some of the activities we can comfortably do. It is important to maintain as great a range of motion as possible to avoid fractures and pain during activity. This is especially important for persons with arthritis. Stretching also helps prevent and treat low back pain, and promotes better posture.

When you stretch your muscles, you should stretch so no muscle ever feels more than just slightly uncomfortable. Don't force the stretch or stretch to the point of pain. Hold the stretch for 15 to 30 seconds, three times in a row with rests in between. Doing stretching exercises 3 times a week will preserve your current level; 4-5 times a week will increase your range of motion.

#### General Guidelines

- Relax, take it slow and easy
- If any stretching hurts, omit it
- Never bounce. Ease into the stretch and hold it
- Don't hyper extend a joint
- Never hold your breath while stretching
- Warm up before stretching. Cool downs aren't needed
- Your stretch routine can and should be used as part of your aerobics or weight training

In general, you will want to move all of your muscles and joints through their full comfortable range of motion. You can start at your neck and work down through your shoulders, back, arms, fingers, legs, feet and toes, or in any order you wish. Swimming and other water activities in general are excellent for increasing flexibility because the lower gravity pull in water yields greater range of motion and reduces pressure on your joints.

There are dozens of good resources available for specific stretching routines that will ensure all your muscle groups get attention. This guide is not intended to replace the input you will want to obtain from your physician and trained fitness instructor.

## **EXERCISE EXAMPLES**

This guide is intended to provide you with general information encouraging you to become more active. We cannot stress enough the importance of consulting with your personal physician before you embark on any exercise program. The Wisconsin Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, Inc., and Argus Rehab, Inc., creators of this educational program, assume no liability whatsoever for injuries or conditions arising from any activity or exercise program you initiate following this program.

To include specific examples of all the various exercises you could do for aerobic conditioning, muscle conditioning, and stretching is beyond the scope of this guidebook. There are many excellent books and videos currently available describing exercises specifically designed for older persons. A bibliography is included in this guide with just a sampling of these. There are often resources available through your local hospitals or fitness centers as well. Many address specific exercise needs for persons with various medical conditions. **Again, be sure to get cleared for exercise by your doctor before you start.**

## SETTING UP A SCHEDULE

The best overall exercise program you could participate in would include aerobic exercise at least 3 times per week, calisthenic exercise at least 3 times per week, and stretching accompanying the other forms as well as being done separately. Mature adults should limit vigorous exercise to no more than 5 days per week, and energetic sessions should not last more than an hour each. You can do active leisure activities daily.

You can enjoy as narrow or as broad a range of activities as you like. For instance, you may just like to walk as your aerobic exercise, but you could alternate walking routes outdoors as well as indoors at local malls, schools, or fitness centers throughout the week. Perhaps you would prefer walking one time, biking the next, and swimming for your third aerobic activity. Some people like to alternate “land”-based activity with water activities.

## Sample Exercise Schedules

**Sample for a fitness club member:**

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
Active leisure activity -- gardening	Aerobics class and stretching	Weight machines and stretching	Lap swim and stretching	Weight machines and stretching	Rowing machine and stretching	Weight machine and stretching

In the above example, the individual included three aerobic exercise days (Mon, Wed, and Fri). Calisthenics or muscle conditioning took place three days (Tue, Thur, and Sat), with breaks from weight training in between each day. Stretching takes place as a warm up to every exercise day. This schedule includes the recommended 3 days per week of aerobic activity and 3 days of muscle conditioning. This is a fairly high-intensity exercise program, which you would probably work up to after a while.

**Sample for an individual who does not use a fitness club:**

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
Active leisure activity -- walk at park	Weight training with light weights and stretching	Bike ride and stretching	Weight training with light weights and stretching	Walking at the mall and stretching	Weight training with light weights and stretching	Line dancing and stretching

In this example, aerobic activity and muscle conditioning take place three days each as well, alternating. Stretching accompanies each activity also.

It is important to remember that these are merely guidelines and goals. Your individual needs, preferences, and abilities will probably vary from the perfect “model” exercise schedule. *That’s OK!* When setting up your schedule, try to include at least one aerobic and one muscle training exercise session each week, initially. Move up as you are able to higher frequencies and intensities. Always include stretching with every activity, especially as a warm-up.

**Blank Schedules for Your Personal Use**

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
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<b>SUN</b>	<b>MON</b>	<b>TUE</b>	<b>WED</b>	<b>THU</b>	<b>FRI</b>	<b>SAT</b>

<b>SUN</b>	<b>MON</b>	<b>TUE</b>	<b>WED</b>	<b>THU</b>	<b>FRI</b>	<b>SAT</b>

# **CONCLUSION**

As the population of older Americans continues to grow, more and more emphasis is being placed on their particular health and fitness needs. Much research has been done to date to support our goal of helping you to become more active. Inactive people, old or young, just aren't as healthy as their active counterparts. And "active" does not have to mean Olympic athlete material! By just increasing your activity level somewhat, you will realize health benefits, *no matter how old you are when you start*. Combining a healthy activity level with smart eating and good habits will allow you to live longer and be in better shape. By staying active, you prolong your life so you can enjoy your family and friends longer, and can continue to do the physical activities required in everyday living.

The Wisconsin Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, Inc., and Argus Rehab, Inc. encourage you to take steps toward a more active, healthy lifestyle. We stress the importance, however, of consulting your physician and obtaining proper training from fitness professionals before you undertake any increase in activity. We assume no responsibility whatsoever for any injuries or adverse medical conditions arising from your exercise program.

This material was compiled and written by Amy Manahan Dominski, Marketing Director for Argus, Rehab, Inc., Mequon, Wisconsin. December, 1995.

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There are a variety of books and videos available dealing with exercise and the older person. Your local public library, bookstore, video store, and hospital medical library are sources for you to check.

# Staying Active

## A Guide for Individuals over 50

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