Exercise for Healthy Older Adults: Getting Started

The key to beginning an exercise program is to know your starting point and build slowly from there. Knowing your starting point will help you pick activities that are comfortable and realistic for you. Starting out this way also will help you be successful. Think about a typical weekday and weekend day. How much time do you spend sitting? How much time are you active? When you're up and moving, what kinds of activities are you doing?

Write down some ways you think you can add activities to your daily routine.

If you're not active yet, aim for a modest beginning and build from there. If you are already pretty active, then you can be more ambitious about adding to your activities.

Sample Exercise Program

It's important to spend about 5 minutes at the beginning and end of your routine to warm up and cool down. Warming up and cooling down give your muscles a chance to get ready to work and gradually return to rest at the end. These "before-and-after" activities help prevent injury and reduce muscle soreness later. Here are a few suggestions:

Do some light endurance activity first, such as walking for 5 minutes. If you're going to be walking briskly or running, gradually build up to that pace. At the end of your activity, gradually slow down and let your body cool down.

Do a few exercises to work the muscles and joints you'll be using in your activity. For example, if you're going to be swimming, do a few arm exercises first to warm up your arms and shoulders.

If you're going to include stretching exercises as part of your routine, do them afterwards.

Adapted from: Exercise & Physical Activity: Your Everyday Guide from the National Institute on Aging. Available at http://www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/ExerciseGuide/default.htm Accessed May 6, 2009.

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