

SENIOR HEALTH | ADVICE



NEW ROUTINES

Fitness changes as you age. Here's how to change with it

MORAYO OGUNBAYO
Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Throughout life's many stages, finding — and sticking to — a fitness routine can be complicated. Whether you struggle to find the right time or place, it seems like there's always something hindering you from getting that perfect schedule down.

As you age, this can become even more complicated. The workouts may not come as easy

as they used to. Certain times of day that used to be optimal may now lead to extreme discomfort. One major drawback might be finding a new spot to work out after a move from your longtime community.

But there are benefits to overcoming these hurdles.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the benefits of a consistent workout routine may be even greater for people 65 or older. In the short

term, it can improve older adults' sleep quality, anxiety levels and blood pressure. As the years go on, the CDC says consistent fitness can assist in cancer prevention, maintaining a healthy weight and living independently longer.

While your body changes, your fitness routine should change along with it. Here are tips to make sure you continue to have the safest and most productive workouts.

1 Monitor your condition closely

If the workouts you have always done seem harder now, that could be a sign that your body can no longer do the same things safely. To continue working your body in similar ways, monitor your condition as you work out.

One simple way to properly check on yourself during a workout is with a simple talk test, as described by Dr. Michael Kraft, assistant professor in the Department of Family and Preventive Medicine at Emory University.

"Making sure that you're able to talk throughout the activity is super important," Kraft said. "If you start to become breathless, you're starting to go up into the higher heart rate zones."

It is best to start any physical activity slowly and gradually work your way up to your limit, rather than the other way around. According to the National Institute of Aging, this can reduce injury and help to "build confidence, motivation and a regular routine."

2 Take your medical conditions into account

Throughout life, medical conditions or injuries have likely affected your workout routine in some way.

One unexpected change many older adults face are the new ways their body reacts to heat, particularly because of medications that increase dehydration.

"Some of the diuretics that are out there, if you're elderly, can cause us to not be able to dissipate the heat well," Kraft said.

He implores older adults to take into account if they have conditions or are on medications that predispose them for dehydration or overheating. The NIA recommends speaking with your doctor before starting a new workout and ask how any existing health issues may hinder your abilities.

3 Lean into the gadgets

If you've watched fitness trends come and go, gadgets like smart watches and heart rate monitors might seem unnecessary. But these devices can help keep you safe while you exercise.

Consider investing in a smart watch that checks for blood pressure, blood glucose and heart rate. With these tools, you can know exactly how your body is reacting to each workout you throw at it.

At-home fitness bikes, treadmills and walking pads also can be beneficial in providing a safe place for you to consistently work out, no matter the weather conditions.

4 Don't settle on one activity

There may have been one fitness activity you stuck to throughout your life, but as you age, it might be better to diversify your workouts.

The NIA suggests older adults engage in a "combination of aerobic, muscle-strengthening, and balance activities" each week.

Activities such as swimming, dancing and working in the yard can be considered part of a balanced fitness routine.