

# Living 50 Plus



## How exercise can help you live longer

There are many reasons to get in shape. Weight loss is a prime motivator, as is reversing a negative health effect, such as high cholesterol or increased diabetes risk. Routine exercise also can improve life expectancy.

WebMD says exercise keeps the body and brain healthy. That's why exercise should be an important component of daily life no matter one's age.

Research published in the journal Immune Aging found that how people age is 75 percent lifestyle and only 25 percent genetics, which underscores the importance of the lifestyle choices people make.

### Cardiorespiratory fitness

Many health experts say that cardiorespiratory fitness may be just as valuable a metric to determine overall health as blood pressure and lipid levels. People with a high aerobic capacity can deliver oxygen to tissues and cells efficiently to fuel exercise, according to data published in 2014 in the journal Aging & Disease. In a study involving 11,335 women, researchers compared V02 max, also known as aerobic capacity, in women with mortality data. Women who were fit from a cardiovascular perspective had a lower death rate from

all causes, irrespective of the women's weight.

### Manage stress and mood

Exercise has direct stress-busting benefits that can promote longevity. The Mayo Clinic says physical activity can increase the production of endorphins, which are the body's feel-good neurotransmitters. In addition, exercise can imitate the effects of stress, helping the body adjust its flight or fight response accordingly, and help them cope with mildly stressful situations. While engaged in exercise, people may forget about their problems as they are focused on the activity at hand.

### Improve bone health

Strength training and physical activity can stave off the effects of frailty and osteoporosis, which affects bone strength. A study published in the Journal of Internal Medicine in 2017 found that hip fractures are associated with diminished quality of life and survival among the elderly. One in three adults aged 50 and over dies within 12 months of suffering a hip fracture, and older adults have a five- to eight-times greater risk of dying within three months following a hip



fracture. Building muscle strength, balance and bone density through exercise can reduce falls and frailty, helping to prevent fracture-related health risks.

### Addresses sarcopenia

The health and wellness resource Healthline defines sarcopenia as the loss of muscle mass specifically related to aging. Doctors once considered this muscle loss inevitable, and it can affect stamina and lead to weakness. However, new indications suggest that exercise is the main treatment regimen for sarcopenia, particularly resistance training. This is designed to improve muscle strength and help balance hormone levels by turning protein into energy for older adults.

These are just some of the ways exercise can help older adults live longer, healthier lives.

## A Box of Greeting Cards

A few months ago, I got the idea to send greeting cards to some residents of a local nursing home who were locked down and not allowed to have visitors. It started small: a box of greeting cards and the first names of some of the residents, courtesy of the facility director. The idea has, to put it mildly, expanded.

First there was the call from the facility director wanting to know if I could enlarge my list because the residents were talking among themselves about who got cards and who didn't.

"Certainly," I said, and bought more cards.

A further expansion came when a woman called me saying that her mother was in that facility, but her mother-in-law was in another local place, and would I send cards to a few people there as well?

"Certainly," I said, and bought more cards.

You see where this is going? It wasn't long before I

knew I needed some help. It wasn't only signing and addressing the cards, it was writing an individual letter to go in each envelope.

I called the guidance counselor at the high school and the ideas just flew. The service club is writing letters; they roped in the art club, which is producing individual drawings and paintings for each nursing home resident. The chorus stepped up and is planning an outdoor concert in the front of each facility when the weather warms up. (At this point they practice their music on Zoom calls.) And two students have initiated a project where in they're collecting craft supplies for the therapist at the nursing home to use with the residents.

Does this sound like something you can start in your own area? You can start small. All it takes is a box of greeting cards -- and a few ideas.

## Vaccinated? COVID Advice Clear as Mud

If you're confused about COVID vaccine and when our lives are going to change for the better, you're not alone.

We're considered to be fully vaccinated once two weeks have passed after the second dose of Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, or two weeks after the one-dose Johnson & Johnson.

What's new is this, per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: If fully vaccinated, you can be indoors with other fully vaccinated people without wearing a mask. You can meet indoors with unvaccinated people in one household unless one of those people has a health risk. If you've been around someone who has COVID, you don't have to stay away from people or get tested unless you have symptoms ... or live in a group setting. In that case, stay away from others for 14 days and get tested, even

if you don't have symptoms.

Clear as mud, right?

It gets worse. According to the CDC, as fabulous as this new vaccine is, even if fully vaccinated, we still need to wear masks in public. We still need to social distance. We still need to avoid medium and large crowds. We still need to stay out of poorly ventilated spaces. We should delay travel.

So what's the holdup? Why are we still under restrictions after getting the vaccine? The best I can figure out is that the answer lies with the COVID variants, the different versions created as

the virus mutates. It appears that not all of the vaccines work equally well on all of the variants. Frankly, some of the vaccines work rather poorly, depending on which variant it encounters.

Until scientists figure this out, we still need to be cautious: wear masks, stay away from people, stay out of crowds. Except for getting the vaccine, not much has changed.

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