

Lift, stretch, aerobicize to counteract aging

Ever hear the phrases “you’re getting old,” “you’re as old as you feel” or “age is a state of mind”? Yes, we all are getting old, and yes, you usually feel your age and age is an attitude of knowing your limits but always physically doing what you desire.

Everyone feels the effects of age, some people sooner than others, predominantly due to their lifestyles.

Men begin “getting old” at age 20 and women at 22 – plus or minus two years for both – after their growth plates fuse. Sad, I know, but the good news is that the body was built to endure the high levels of exertion and pounding of running, biking, climbing, weight lifting and skiing.

Strength, power, flexibility and balance decline with age. If you are looking for a simple solution, start training in addition to the fun activities you enjoy outside. This additional activity should include resistance and power training, balance exercise and, one of the more important, stretching.

Key educators from Universities in Kentucky and Oregon wrote an article in 1999 that many still refer to today. Kent Adams, Patrick and Katie O’Shea collaborated to write a journal on age-related changes in the body.

Strength is crucial to quality of life. Without adequate strength levels, even the most basic tasks become difficult or impossible to perform without assistance. As life expectancy grows, the decline in muscle strength with aging becomes

a matter of increasing importance. Research suggests that from ages 30 to 80, back, leg and arm strength decrease 30 percent to 40 percent.

To battle this decline, a resistance training program is vital. The idea that the older adult can derive health benefits from resistance training is no longer considered theory but, rather, confirmed fact. Developing a resistance training program is essential to maintaining a healthy lifestyle and avoiding the possibility of ending up in a nursing home.



Training to be balanced

Augie Hernandez

Resistance training options include Olympics-style lifting, machines and free weights. The research on machines versus free weights overwhelmingly supports the latter in developing overall strength, power and flexibility. Free-weight training develops superior neuromuscular function, especially in the muscle sensory system. Strength physiologists agree that free weights provide proprioceptive kinesthetic

feedback similar to that provided by functional living tasks, resulting in increased neuromuscular coordination within the body. For older people, this provides for the improvement or maintenance of motor skills critical to independent functional living. As important, free-weight training builds a state of mind that says, “I’m strong, I’m capable and all systems say go.”

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An important aspect of this is

power endurance. This is the ability of muscles to contract and produce force for extended periods of time without fatigue. Power endurance is a major factor in long-distance walking, hiking, cross-country skiing and biking. To maximize power endurance, one needs a good level of cardiovascular fitness (aerobic power). Muscular strength combined with aerobic endurance equals power endurance. The most effective meth-

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od for developing power endurance is through a cross-training program of circuit weight training and aerobic activities.

What’s required are freestanding power-type lifts that train and develop the body as a functional unit through a full range of multi-joint body movement. For example, the power snatch and power clean exercises together, develop strength, neuromuscular coordination, balance and flexibility, which is the primary purpose of weight training for adults 50 and older. Once the lifting technique has been learned and mastered, the lifts are not dangerous for male or female adults. Light weights are all that is required for training with intensity set at two sets of eight to 10 repetitions.

For developing power endurance,

a cross training program is necessary for strength and endurance. Cross-training maintains a balance between strength and cardiovascular fitness for health and doing the chores of daily living.

Flexibility is an important component of fitness that older people need but often neglect. Flexibility as a safety factor in preventing falls is often overlooked. At any age, good flexibility equals good mobility. Flexibility coupled with strength permits one to perform household activities with reduced risk of injury. People with arthritis must be very conscious of their need to fight pain and stiffness through proper exercise and stretching.

Frequently, lower back pain is associated with stiffness in the hips and back and is corrected with stretching. Free-weight training, in combination with a program of stretching and swimming, develops and maintains good joint flexibility, i.e., the ability of muscles to stretch, allowing the joint to move safely through a full range of movement. Areas of major focus are muscles of the hips, lower back, thighs, and hamstrings. Flexibility in these muscle groups contribute most to functional living.

When you’re feeling old just remember: Philip Rabinowitz entered the *Guinness Book of World Records* for centenarian sprinting by clocking 30.86 seconds over 100 meters at a Cape Town, Africa, stadium, demolishing the record of 36.19 set by the Austrian Erwin Jaskulski.

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