

Busting Eight Myths About Exercise and Aging

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Getting older does not mean you will spend your life in a rocking chair. If you want to live a long and healthy life, regular exercise will help you do just that. Don't let the myths about exercising as we age slow you down. We asked Cindy Martin, an exercise physiologist at [The McConnell Heart Health Center](#), to bust eight of the most common myths about exercise and aging.

Myth #1: Exercise hurts aging joints

Senior fitness prevents or delays a decline in mobility due to joint swelling, stiffness or pain. "Our orthopedic doctors at the [McConnell Spine, Sport and Joint Center](#) like to say, 'Motion is lotion.' The more you move, the healthier your joints will be," Cindy explains. A well-designed senior fitness program can help you build strength, flexibility and balance, which will protect your joints.

Myth #2: Exercise won't help declines in brain function

Research has shown that learning, memory, judgment and mental flexibility decline with age. However, regular exercise releases the brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a protein that builds new mental connections and enhances learning and memory. Higher levels of

BDNF have been shown to slow age-related memory decline and preserve brain function.

Myth #3: Older adults need to exercise less frequently

Exercise guidelines are the same for every adult, regardless of age. “Any adult should get 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity and two to three strength training sessions per week. Additionally, seniors benefit from balance exercises at least three times a week,” Cindy recommends.

However, those activities do not have to occur in a gym. “Your body doesn’t care if you are in a gym, a park or cleaning your garage. Big movements that make you breathe harder using lots of muscles count as cardio. Lifting, carrying and moving heavy loads is strength training. What is important is that you are active regularly,” Cindy says.

Myth #4: High-impact workouts are not safe for seniors, but low-impact workouts are less effective

First, we asked Cindy to define each type of workout. “When you engage in low-impact exercise, you keep one foot on the ground at all times, like walking. High-impact activities occur when both feet leave the ground, like jogging,” she explains. High-impact exercise puts extra pressure on your bones and joints, but they are also generally high-intensity or burn calories more quickly.

“High-impact workouts are not the only option for getting a calorie-blasting workout. For example, our gym ellipticals and bikes have resistance to give a high-intensity workout without the impact on joints,” Cindy describes. Research shows that seniors can use high-intensity workouts the same way younger exercisers do. So, if you want to pack more into a shorter workout, you can crank up the intensity rather than the impact.

Myth #5: Older adults should avoid strength training

As you age, strength training activities like lifting weights or using resistance bands actually become more important. “Our bodies shed muscle if we do not work to maintain it. Most seniors need to do strength training to prevent muscle loss,” Cindy says. When we lose muscle, our bodies burn fewer calories, which can lead to body fat gains. Less muscle also increases the risk of injuries and falls. “With regular exercise and the right nutrition, you can build muscle for better health at any age,” Cindy continues.

Myth #6: Most older adults have weak bones

Osteoporosis, a decrease in bone density and mass, is preventable. Regular exercise can prevent and even reverse bone loss. “Walking is the most often recommended form of senior fitness to promote bone health. Strength training can be very beneficial, too, because it

strengthens areas like your wrist. If you already have osteoporosis, ask your doctor or an exercise professional about an appropriate senior fitness program,” Cindy says.

Myth #7: Gyms are for young people

The McConnell Heart Health Center is a gym for everyone 18 and over. “We are a medically based fitness center. We help new members get started and assist current members to address their changing needs. Many of our members come from our clinical programs, but we also have community members and OhioHealth employees,” Cindy shares.

Myth #8: There comes a point when you’re too old to exercise

Not true! Cardio exercise will keep your heart and lungs healthy, and strength training will protect your joints and keep you limber. Both will improve your brain function and mood. However, as an older adult, take extra care to prevent falls, protect your joints, and avoid exercises that twist or bend your spine. “It is essential to listen to your body and DO NOT push through pain,” Cindy recommends.

The common myths of exercise and aging are just that—myths, not realities. You can and should exercise for your health and happiness, no matter how old you are. To learn more about the McConnell Heart Health Center fitness program, call (614) 566-5356.

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