

Beginning an Exercise Program Over 50 By Kent Pegg

Are you over 50 and thinking of starting an exercise program? Good news! Getting started is probably a lot easier than you think.

Whether you're fifty or seventy or any age, now is the best time to begin. Today, many people are living well into their nineties. This can be either good news or bad news depending on their level of health and fitness.

I see and work with many people each day who are in their sixties, seventies, and eighties and are in great shape! These people are working out and are not limited at all in what they can accomplish in or out of the gym.

Still not convinced it's time to start a fitness program? Think about these benefits of exercise:

- increased longevity
- reduced risk of heart disease, stroke, and cancer
- increased bone strength
- stronger muscles and joints
- fewer everyday injuries
- better posture
- lower cholesterol

And this list could go on and on. Now that you know you should begin an exercise program, the only question is how to begin.

The first thing you should do is to check with your physician. When doing so make sure to get specific recommendations for exercises that you should or should not do and inquire about any limitations to your exercise program.

Next, meet with a fitness professional at the facility where you choose to work out. Every gym should have trained people available to assist you with what exercises to do and how to do them properly.

Your program should contain exercises that will help you develop in three ways: increase your flexibility, enhance your cardiovascular endurance, and increase your strength.

To increase your flexibility and mobility consider taking a yoga or stretching class. Trained instructors can facilitate significant increases in flexibility during these classes.

Additionally, a class provides a group environment where you can get the support of the other members of the class. Remember to start slow and gradually increase your flexibility over a period of time.

To enhance your cardiovascular endurance and control your weight, you'll need to exercise in a way that increases your heart rate. Start with no-impact or low-impact activities like riding a recumbent bike, walking on a treadmill or using an elliptical trainer. These pieces of equipment allow you to get your heart rate up without significant risk of injury to your knees, hips or lower back.

Begin slowly and gradually work your way up to thirty minutes of activity at least two to three times per week. You'll notice that it won't take long to increase both the rate of exercise and the duration of exercise.

One of the most difficult things for someone just starting out is to properly design a strengthening program. Weight training is a critical component of your exercise routine, especially for increasing bone density and preventing osteoporosis, but many fear injuring themselves or simply not knowing what to do. Try the following approach.

If you're just beginning your exercise program, begin by working out on circuit training equipment available in most gyms. These machines are easy to use and will isolate all the major muscle groups in your body: chest, back, shoulders, biceps, triceps, quads, hamstrings, glutes, and abs.

Use these machines two to three times per week to increase your muscle strength and associated joint strength. Because these machines are easy to use and generally have you in a seated position, they are typically safe exercises to use to begin your strengthening program.

However, because these are seated exercises, you'll want to gradually add standing, weight bearing exercises to your routine. This is necessary because to get maximum increase in bone density in your hips and spine (the areas where it's needed most), you'll need to be standing or in a position that places compressive forces on the hips and spine. It's a good idea to have a professional trainer check your form on these exercises from time to time.

Once you've gotten the hang of the exercises that work your various body parts, consider working out different muscle groups on different days. This will allow you more time to work on each area and accelerate your strengthening of each area.

Begin by working out your upper body on one day and your lower body on another. In time, you might consider splitting your upper body workout into two days focusing on your back and biceps (pulling exercises) on one day and on your chest, shoulders and triceps (pushing exercises) on another day.

You'll be surprised how fast you improve and how noticeable the results. You'll have more endurance, less pain, and be able to handle daily tasks easier than ever.

Bottom line, there is no better time to begin your exercise program than now. Every hour you spend in the gym now will save you many more hours if you wait until later to start.

Beginning an exercise program should be neither intimidating nor difficult. Talk with your physician, consult with a fitness professional, and get started! A long, healthy, active life is just around the corner.

Kent Pegg is the co owner of the Los Alamos Fitness Center and is a certified personal trainer. For a free consultation on how to begin your exercise program, call 662-5232.