



FIT FOR LIFE

How to Stay Healthy, Flexible and Strong

by Aimee Hughes

“When thinking about the best forms of exercise as we enter midlife and beyond, we should first clarify some myths and preconceptions,” says Michael Spitzer, of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, biochemist, fitness expert and author of *Fitness at 40, 50, 60 and Beyond*. “In our society, there’s a mindset that once we pass our 40th year, it’s all downhill from there. Our metabolism slows and we gain weight, lose mobility and flexibility, deal with more aches and pains, experience shortness of breath and the list goes on.”

According to Spitzer, this all can happen, but it’s more of a self-fulfilling prophecy than destiny. “Research with older people at both rehabilitation and nursing centers tells us that the human body wasn’t designed to begin a major decline in function until age 70, barring major illness or accidents along the way. Most of individual decline is due to lifestyle choices, not nature’s plan.”

Spitzer teaches his clients that weight training is essential for every age group. “After age 30, most people lose between 0.5 to 1 percent of lean muscle fiber per year, which directly affects the basal metabolic rate. Much like a car engine, the more lean muscle mass we have, the more energy our ‘engine’ uses, even when idling. If not prevented, by age 50, for example, we may have lost as much as 20 percent of the lean muscle fiber we had when we were 30.”

He also recommends regular cardiovascular exercise. “Do a good round of cardio inside your target heart rate zone for 30 minutes at least three times a week. It’s vital for lung and heart health, the primary benefit of cardio exercise as opposed to just burning calories.”

“For those in their 40s, I recommend high-intensity interval training such as burst training, along with a mind-body practice like power yoga or

budokon,” says Nelson Pahl, of Northfield, Minnesota, managing editor of *Longevity Times*. “Vinyasa yoga, tai chi and cycling are ideal during our 50s, while hatha yoga, tai chi, or qigong and hiking work well in our 60s.”

“Most of my clients are 70 and up,” notes Gwyneth Jones, an active aging specialist at the Carriage Club, in Kansas City, Missouri, who also trains physical therapists, rehabilitation specialists and movement educators. “They enjoy mixing up their daily exercise routines and look forward to the support and encouragement of their classmates. Discussions include lighthearted wordplay and questions about anatomy and physiology.”

Pahl urges everyone at every age, “Consume only whole foods, always.” He rarely drinks alcohol and begins every day with yoga and qigong.

“Also, be sure to stay well hydrated,” adds Jones. “This will keep your joints healthy, skin clear and moist, digestion more efficient and detoxification of organ systems more effective. Add fresh lemon if you like.”

Physical fitness is only one aspect of aging gracefully. Spiritual growth lifts and lightens any mental and emotional load, while supporting physical well-being.

Spitzer also recommends, “Reading, learning to play a musical instrument, crafting activities, computer strategy games or doing other activities that require concentration or new problem-solving skills; all help the mind stay tuned up and sharp.” It’s always healthy to break out of normal routines and comfort zones, venture into new worlds, volunteer and do what makes our heart soar.

Jones advises, “Choose activities that feel good, refreshing, include people you enjoy, and are done in pleasant environments. Don’t forget to revel in sunshine or a good book on a rainy day. Listen to music, play music, sing and dance every day.”

Maturity brings benefits we can embrace with delight when we bring loving attention and happy novelty to life.

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