

Script – Print - One Foot Forward

You're Never Too Old to Start Exercising

We all know how important it is to incorporate exercise into our daily routine. It's especially important for people over 50, a group especially vulnerable to illness, chronic diseases and depression. Experts say that being active and exercising regularly can actually help fight the effects of aging.

"The benefits of exercising over the age of 50 are reducing your risks of certain diseases, and problems that occur as we age like muscle loss, arthritis, osteopenia (bone loss), just different things that get harder as we get older," said Ricki Hickok, exercise physiologist, OSF HealthCare.

Most experts like Hickok recommend 30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise per day at least five days per week. That might be easy for some, but exercising after 50 is far different than working out in your 20s and 30s. That's why it's important to make sure you start slow and have realistic expectations. Most importantly, consult with your doctor before starting any type of program.

"It is definitely different in terms of intensity, time length that you can spend doing it, types of exercise, a lot of people over the age of 50 have some deconditioning or some arthritis already building up that we have to be careful of," said Ricki Hickok, exercise physiologist, OSF HealthCare. "It is important as you age to get doctor's clearance because of these factors that have occurred over time, and it can be different in the way you might not like the same exercises you did 20 years ago."

That includes strength training. There are many benefits of strength training, but getting started after 50 comes with challenges—especially if you have a history of back, hip, knee, or other joint pain. Hickok recommends strength training two or three times a week and working on your arms, shoulders and legs in the process.

"Strength training is really important as we age especially going back to arthritis and bone loss," said Ricki Hickok, exercise physiologist, OSF HealthCare. "We want to make sure we have strong muscles to support our bones. It's important to start easy, start simple, if you have no prior knowledge or experience with strength training it's great to refer to people like me, exercise physiologists or personal trainers at a local fitness facility."

The same goes for aerobic exercise. Some of the best ways to get your heart pumping are running, swimming, biking or just working around the house. Walking is a great way to exercise because it's accessible and requires no equipment. The key is to shoot for 10,000 steps a day.

"There are so many different types of activities and it helps because we all need to be productive in other forms," said Ricki Hickok, exercise physiologist, OSF HealthCare. "The house needs cleaning, the snow needs shoveling or if you need to use a snow blower, that's okay too, pushing that through the snow is tough work. If you have a garden or grandchildren to play with, those are great options. Just cleaning the house speed it up to get your heart beat faster, or do maybe a couple of squats in between dusting or walking with the vacuum a little bit quicker."

Starting an exercise program later in life might be hard at first so Hickok recommends a few helpful tips – keep an exercise journal, work out with friends or find a free online app to track your progress. But no matter how you do it, the most important thing is to just get started.

“Especially as we age we have to take the pressure off of ourselves and our expectations,” said Ricki Hickok, exercise physiologist, OSF HealthCare. “I think a lot of people feel forced to exercise when it should feel good and something that you look forward to. If you don’t find what you enjoy, it’s going to be hard to find success.”

For more information, visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).