

Exercise and Aging

ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTH STATISTICS, ONLY 32 PERCENT OF SENIOR CITIZENS EXERCISE ON A DAILY BASIS. MANY SHY AWAY FROM EXERCISE DUE TO PHYSICAL OR MENTAL LIMITATIONS. WHILE INDIVIDUALS MAY HAVE LIMITATIONS, THERE ARE EXERCISES AVAILABLE FOR EVERYONE. **BY JESSICA A. PAVELKO, CSA**



Yoga is a great form of exercise for seniors, as it addresses the four elements – stretching, balance, endurance and strengthening – that are critical to leading an active life.

REGULAR EXERCISE CAN help seniors maintain and maximize their health, increase their energy levels and improve confidence.

According to the American Council on Exercise®, the benefits of exercise extend to controlling blood pressure, body weight and cholesterol levels. It also aids in reducing risks related to hardening of the arteries, heart attack and stroke. “Being active lowers my blood pressure and blood sugar,” says Bob Sheaffer of Lancaster. “My insulin is lower in the summer, when I am more active than in the winter, therefore cutting health-care costs,” he reports.

Exercise not only conditions muscles, tendons, ligaments and bones to help fight osteoporosis, but it can relieve pain and stiffness, improve digestion and help to manage stress. Carol LeCato, an avid tennis player from Lancaster, says,

“Exercise not only has physical benefits, it gets your mind off of your troubles.” Seniors who are active enjoy life more.

TYPES OF EXERCISES

Endurance, strengthening, stretching and balance are four important activities that will maximize a senior’s quality of life and make daily living easier. Many area health clubs and recreations centers offer programs that are expressly tailored to the needs and interests of seniors.

Endurance

Endurance activities help to increase and build strength, improve the health of the heart and circulatory system, and more. Walking, biking, dancing and swimming are all examples of endurance activities, which promote independence and allow individuals to carry out day-to-day responsibilities like cleaning and running errands with more confidence.

Strengthening

Lifting weights and other strengthening activities build muscle tissue and reduce age-related muscle loss. Studies show that individuals lose 20 to 40 percent of their muscle as they age. Increasing muscle strength is not only important to staying active, but it helps to prevent the risk of falling and suffering a serious injury.

Stretching

Stretching regularly keeps individuals flexible and improves coordination, making them less prone to serious injury. Participating in stretching activities also relaxes the body both physically and mentally. Stretching makes playing with the grandchildren on the floor easier, and provides more confidence when driving.

Balance

Many communities and senior activity centers are incorporating Tai Chi into



their activity schedules. Tai Chi and many other balancing activities such as yoga provide stability, improve posture and quality of walking. Like many other types of exercises, improving balance reduces the fear and risk of falling.

HOW COMMUNITIES ARE INTEGRATING EXERCISES INTO RESIDENTS' DAILY ROUTINES

Retirement communities recognize the importance of integrating exercises into residents' daily schedules. Ronald L. Waack, President and CEO of Pleasant View Retirement Community, points out that exercise is one facet of a comprehensive wellness program. "Being active is one way people of any age can take control of their lives," notes Waack. "When it comes to wellness, there is no downside."

Pleasant View has a resident wellness council and its complement, the employee wellness committee, that track programs and offer suggestions. Waack points to changes that make a difference. Snack machines have healthy options; a low-calorie, high-energy lunch is a staple on Fridays and always follows a weekly wellness lecture. Staff members engage in stretching whenever and wherever possible. Waack believes a healthy staff sets an example for residents.

Country Meadows, among many other communities, is integrating Wii games into its list of activities. Wii Bowling, WiiFit and various other Wii games provide a fun and competitive environment.

Some communities, Landis Homes being one of them, offer outdoor exercise opportunities through Life Trail outdoor-fitness-equipment stations. Located at various points along the one-mile

loop around campus, Life Trail stations offer a great way for residents to adapt their walking routine into a full-body workout, says Marva Godin, director of life enrichment at Landis Homes. Each station is equipped with fitness-activity panels that promote stretching, balance, stamina and socialization.

Landis Homes values the importance of cognitive fitness, as well, with four Dakim Brain Fitness Systems units on campus. Residents feel they are taking their "brain to the gym" with these fun 20-minute sessions of concentration games, says Godin.

Many communities, Pleasant View and Country Meadows among them, are scheduling wellness seminars on a regular basis that are open to the local community. Topics covered may include diabetes management, memory support care, preparing a living will, etc.

Participating in enjoyable activities will keep an individual motivated to continue an active routine. While exercise is important, one must be mindful of other elements that contribute to a healthy lifestyle – balanced diets, not smoking and seeing a doctor when needed. "If exercise could be packed into a pill, it would be the single most widely prescribed, and beneficial, medicine in the nation," says Robert Butler, first director of the National Institute on Aging.

WORKING OUT SENIOR-STYLE

Many local fitness and rec centers offer programs and classes that are expressly geared to seniors. Most offer senior-friendly schedules, as well, with classes held from mid-morning to mid-afternoon.

Universal Athletic Club offers the nationwide Silver Sneakers program that provides members with customized classes, health seminars, an on-site advisor and more. In addition to health benefits, members enjoy the social aspects of the program. Medicare and many health-insurance companies sanction Silver Sneakers. Universal offers such senior-friendly classes as Cardio Circuit, YogaStretch, SilverSplash and CardioFit. Call 569-5369.

Hempfield Rec Center offers a program called Low Intensity-Life Fitness. Classes include Active Folks (endurance, flexibility and strength are emphasized), ABC's (a basic conditioning class) and Zumba Gold (the Latin-dance-inspired class takes a slower approach). The aquatic-fitness classes are geared to all ability levels and

take a go-at-your-own speed approach. Also, a class for seniors with arthritic issues is offered periodically. Call 898-3102.

New Holland Rec Center is also affiliated with Silver Sneakers and offers such senior-friendly classes as Silver Sneaker Cardio Circuit, 60+ Water Exercise, Aquatic Arthritis, Zumba Gold and Yoga Stretch. Call 354-4747.

Lancaster YMCA and Lampeter-Strasburg YMCA offer Active Senior programs that include such classes as Senior Splash and the Arthritis Foundation Aquatic. Call 393-YMCA.

Snap Fitness, with locations in Mount Joy (653-1044) and Marietta (426-1600), is associated with the Silver Sneakers program, as well.

Also, many retirement communities offer memberships in their fitness-and-swim centers to members of the community. Check with a community in your neighborhood for specifics on their policy.

23RD ANNUAL LANCASTER SENIOR GAMES

JUNE 13-17

In 1989, the partnership of the Lancaster County Office of Aging and the Lancaster Recreation Commission created the Lancaster Senior Games. The games combine sports, recreation, friendly competition and fellowship into a week of fun activities for participants, as well as spectators. During the games, Lancaster County residents ages 55 and over participate in a variety of sporting events and recreational activities. These events take place at the Franklin & Marshall Alumni Sports & Fitness Center, Leisure Lanes, Willow Valley Cultural Center, Overlook Golf Course and Evergreen Golf Course. Visit www.lancseniorgames.org for more information.



JESSICA A. PAVELKO, CSA, is a senior consulting specialist. The lifelong Lancaster resident launched Pavelko Senior Consulting Services, LLC (PSCS) in 2006. The business takes a unique personal and professional interest in seniors and their families by assisting them in

assuring all of their resources are being utilized to best meet their needs. PSCS acts as an advocate and navigator for seniors, helping them and their families make wise decisions regarding the care they desire and deserve. For more information, call 717-517-8871, email info@pavelko.org or visit www.pavelko.org.