

Can exercise prevent ageing?

Unsurprisingly, nobody looks forward to experiencing a decline in their mobility, general health or cognitive process as they age. What if you didn't have to?



THE SCIENCE BEHIND HOW EXERCISE SLOWS AGEING

Most people have known for a while that there's a general increase link between exercise and longevity. New research provides an explanation for this relationship: exercise maintains our immune system's youth and effectiveness.

THE LINK BETWEEN REGULAR EXERCISE AND IMPROVED BRAIN FUNCTIONING

One of the scariest side-effects of ageing is the possibility of contracting conditions such as dementia or Alzheimer's. Regular exercise has been scientifically proven to improve our brain's cognitive and executive functions, psychomotor speed and memory.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO NOTE BEFORE YOU START EXERCISING

It's clear that exercise can really be the answer to semi-perpetual youth that keeps our bodies and minds in the pink of health. Here are some important points to note that will help ease the transition into an active lifestyle.

1 Progressive, gradual build-ups

Many people refuse to exercise because they feel like they haven't done it in forever and are too old to start now. That's not true at all! However, starting at an older age means you will most likely have a weaker aerobic base, so it's necessary to take it slow and steady and start with lower-intensity aerobic exercises.

2 Stay injury-free by keeping within safe limits

Injuries go hand-in-hand with recklessness, so make sure you don't overestimate your limits and take on workouts that are too vigorous for you. It's best to consult a doctor or personal trainer that will offer you advice on what forms of training are most suitable for you, whether it's balance or strength training.

3 Keep it simple

You don't have to sign up for expensive packages at a boutique gym or install a full set of exercise equipment in your home. Exercise doesn't have to be fancy or elaborate – simple activities like jogging along the beach or taking the stairs regularly are good enough starts. Large stadium seats can be a good place for triceps dips, and ordinary drink cartons can make for efficient makeshift weights.

4 Don't compare the past with the present

A mistake that many people make is benchmarking their present level of fitness against that of their younger selves. Most of us can't be as fast or strong as we used to. While there is nothing wrong with pushing your limits safely, it's important to recognise how your body has changed over the years. Instead, focus on what is current as the level of activity your body would benefit from now isn't the same as that of a younger person.

5 Find your tribe

Exercising together with others is much better than doing it alone. When you're struggling to finish that last set or jog that last few hundred metres, some social support really makes the difference!

With these tips in mind, your exercise plans will be much more practical and easier to sustain in the long run. What's even more important however – especially if you're starting to exercise only at an older age – is to focus on muscle and bone strength to prevent injuries.

TRAINING MUSCLE STRENGTH

Muscle strengthening simply means training your body's ability to handle load and tension, and it has numerous health benefits such as controlling your blood pressure, preventing heart disease and most importantly, reducing the risk of arthritis and joint problems.

It's important to incorporate aspects of strength training into your exercise schedule because we start to see a decrease in muscle mass, at an average rate of about 3-5% upon reaching our 30s. Experts recommend 2-3 sessions per week, with a focus on intensity. If you're just starting out, simply doing about two or three sets of the following activities for 8-12 repetitions each is sufficient.

Leg press: This trains the quadriceps and hamstrings in your legs and the glutes in your posterior. Strong muscles in these areas can help to better absorb your bodyweight and reduce pressure on the knees and ankles.

Assisted chin-up: This helps to strengthen the muscles in your back, shoulders and arms, making it easier for you to carry loads around such as your groceries.

Push-up: This trains your shoulders, chest, triceps and your core. There are many ways to scale this popular exercise to individual strength levels as well.

There are many other machines available in most regular gyms for strength training, which are really good for you because machines provide a stable training platform for people who don't have a strong base.



TRAINING BONE STRENGTH

Osteoporosis is a bone-related disease that can come with advanced age. Aside from practicing proper nutrition, weight-bearing and weight-resisting exercises can also help to strengthen your bones while building up your fitness at the same time.

Weight-bearing exercises focus on supporting your body weight through your legs or arms, so you can easily achieve these through activities like jogging or air squats. Weight-resisted exercises involve some strength-training as you are pushing your body's ability to overcome resistance, such as by using resistance bands or dumbbells.

The most important thing to note when planning exercises is to account for your own bone density and strength – if you have fragile bones, avoid high-impact exercises like jogging or tennis, and try for simpler activities like ballroom dancing, swimming or even tai chi.

Getting back to regular exercising after years of little to no activity can be intimidating at first, but it's necessary to take these first steps towards lifelong fitness and health.

Everyone has differing muscle strength and aerobic fitness levels, so it's hard to prescribe a standard workout. Get some personalised tips from our fitness experts at our Active Health Labs so that you'll be able to experience a workout routine that will truly meet your needs and help you achieve your targets.

