

Sports Injury Prevention for Baby Boomers

While there may be no single fountain of youth, you can slow down the aging process by staying physically active. Regular exercise enhances muscle and joint function, keeps bones strong, and decreases your risk of heart attack and stroke.

Here are some tips developed by the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine and American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons that can help you exercise safely.

Warm Up

Always take time to warm up and stretch before physical activity. Research studies have shown that cold muscles are more prone to injury. Warm up with jumping jacks, stationary cycling or running or walking in place for 3 to 5 minutes. Then slowly and gently stretch, holding each stretch for 30 seconds. Do not stretch cold muscles.

Cool Down

Just like warming up, it is important to cool down. Gentle stretching after physical activity is very important to prepare your body for the next time you exercise. It will make recovery from exercise easier.

Consistent Exercise Program

Avoid the "weekend warrior" syndrome. Compressing your exercise into 2 days sets you up for trouble and does not increase your fitness level. Try to get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity every day. If you are truly pressed for time, you can break it up into 10-minute chunks. Remember that moderate physical activity can include walking the dog, working in the garden, playing with the kids and taking the stairs instead of an elevator. Parking on the far end of a parking lot will increase the distance you have to walk between your car and your destination.

Be Prepared

Take sports lessons. Whether you are a beginner or have been playing a sport for a long time, lessons are a worthwhile investment. Proper form and instruction reduce the chance of developing an "overuse" injury like tendinitis or a stress fracture.

Lessons at varying levels of play for many sports are offered by local park districts and athletic clubs.

Invest in good equipment. Select the proper shoes for your sport and use them only for that sport. When the treads start to look worn or the shoes are no longer as supportive, it is time to replace them.

Listen to Your Body

As you age, you may find that you are not as flexible as you once were or that you cannot tolerate the same types of activities that you did years ago. While no one is happy about getting older, you will be able to prevent injury by modifying your activity to accommodate your body's needs.

Use the Ten Percent Rule

When changing your activity level, increase it in increments of no more than 10% per week. If you normally walk 2 miles a day and want to increase your fitness level, do not try to suddenly walk 4 miles. Slowly build up to more miles each week until you reach your higher goal. When strength training, use the 10% rule as your guide and increase your weights gradually.

Balanced Fitness

Develop a balanced fitness program that incorporates cardiovascular exercise, strength training, and flexibility. In addition to providing a total body workout, a balanced program will keep you from getting bored and lessen your chances of injury.

Add activities and new exercises cautiously. Whether you have been sedentary or are in good physical shape, do not try to take on too many activities at one time. It is best to add no more than one or two new activities per workout.

If you have or have had a sports or orthopaedic injury like tendinitis, arthritis, a stress fracture, or low back pain, consult an orthopaedic surgeon who can help design a fitness routine to promote wellness and minimize the chance of injury.

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Warm Up, Cool Down and Be Flexible (<http://orthoinfo.aaos.org/topic.cfm?topic=A00310>)

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