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The multifaceted benefits of aerobic exercise

Routine physical activity has a significant impact on physical and mental health. Though the temptation to be sedentary is ever-present and arguably greater than it's ever been, getting up and moving can prolong life and make for happier, healthier days.



There's no wrong way to be physically active, and many health professionals urge people to find a physical activity they enjoy so they're more likely to maintain a commitment to exercise. Aerobic exercise is one option to consider because it encompasses a wide range of activities and pays a wealth of dividends. Running, cycling, hiking, swimming, and even walking are popular forms of aerobic exercise, which benefits the body in myriad ways.

Aerobic exercise and disease prevention

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons notes that a fitness regimen that includes regular aerobic exercise can help people avoid potentially deadly diseases, including heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and some cancers. Johns Hopkins Medicine notes that aerobic exercise, which organizations such as the American Heart Association advise combining with strength-training exercises at least twice per week, is effective at preventing disease because it helps to control or modify various risk factors for conditions like heart disease.

Aerobic exercise and bone strength

Another notable benefit of routine aerobic exercise is it helps to build stronger bones. Harvard Health notes that various studies have shown that weight-bearing exercises, including aerobic activities like walking or running, put stress on bones which stimulates the formation of extra deposits of calcium and activates bone-forming cells. This process ultimately results in denser, stronger bones, which is a particularly notable benefit for adults over 40, a point in time when bone strength typically begins to decline at a rate of roughly 1 percent each year.

Aerobic exercise and mental health

Harvard Health notes the benefits of aerobic exercise extend beyond the physical and into the mental. That link is neurochemical in nature, as aerobic exercise stimulates the production of endorphins, which Harvard Health notes are chemicals in the brain that naturally elevate mood, contributing to feelings of both relaxation and optimism. While that's happening, aerobic exercise also helps to reduce levels of the body's stress hormones.

Aerobic exercise is accessible and highly beneficial. Individuals of all ages are urged to commit to routine aerobic exercise so they can reap the physical and mental health rewards such a commitment produces.

How screen time effects adults

The effects of screen time are a point of frequent conversation. However, such discussions often focus on the impact of screen time on the health and well-being of children. But children are not the only age group who has to consider how much time they spend with their devices.

Many professionals spend hours on end in front of computers, and those same people may spend a lot of their free time watching shows and/or scrolling social media and news stories online.

There are quite a number of negative effects of too much screen time, even for adults. However, the point in time when device usage is considered detrimental to adults' health is not clearly defined. Some health experts say that limiting social media use to 30 minutes per day leads to a "significant improvement in well-being." If that isn't enough to convince adults to put down their devices, perhaps an examination of the various harmful side effects of screens might do the job.

-- **Depression:** A 2017 study published in the journal Preventative Medicine Reports found a significant association between television watching and computer use with moderate or severe levels of depression. Several studies also have found a positive association between screen time and depression in adolescents.

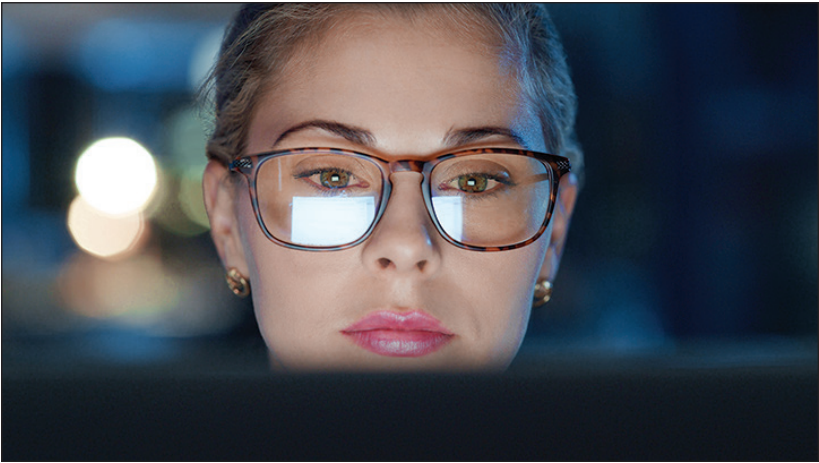
-- **Eye strain:** Looking at screens can impact eye health. The American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends the 20-20-20 rule for adults who work on a computer. This rule says that individuals look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes of the day.

-- **Neck and back pain:** Time spent sitting at a desk or on a phone and looking down adversely affects the body. This places strain on the neck, shoulders and back. In fact, many health care providers refer to the condition as "tech neck." Pain can occur and the risk for severe musculoskeletal issues can increase when these positions are held for too long, according to Reid Health.

-- **Cognitive changes:** A 2020 study in Science Direct found that adults who have been diagnosed with smartphone addiction had problems with the part of their brains responsible for transmitting messages. Such adults also exhibited reduced cognitive performance. In addition, Stanford Lifestyle Medicine reports adults who watched television for five hours or more per day had an increased risk of developing brain-related diseases like dementia, stroke or Parkinson's.

-- **Reduced physical activity:** People who spend too much time on screens may be less likely to engage in physical activity, such as going on walks, working in the garden, playing sports, or engaging in active hobby projects. A sedentary lifestyle is linked to various health implications, such as increased risk for obesity and the health problems that come with being overweight.

-- **Impact sleep:** The JAMA Network reports that among



a cross-sectional analysis of 122,058 participants in the American Cancer Society Cancer Prevention Study-3, screen use was associated with decreased sleep duration and worse self-reported sleep quality. Electronic screen use before bed can disrupt circadian rhythms, leading to poorer sleep.

Screen time is not just a concern for children. Adults should moderate screen usage to safeguard themselves from an assortment of negative, device-related outcomes.



Tips to ensure a better night’s sleep

A state of sleep is necessary to give the body and mind time to recharge and prepare for the next day. Though such benefits are widely recognized, a significant percentage of individuals across the globe are failing to get sufficient rest, a dangerous reality that could be putting people at risk for various diseases and conditions.

Lack of sleep is such a prominent problem that the research team behind a 2024 study published in the journal *The Lancet: Diabetes & Endocrinology* dubbed insufficient sleep as a “neglected public health issue.” That study surveyed 2,000 adults in the United Kingdom and found that 90 percent of respondents reported current sleep problems, with two-thirds of those individuals indicating they had experienced their issues for more than six years. And it’s not just adults suffering from sleep issues, as a 2023 peer-reviewed editorial written for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that the modern 24-hour lifestyle and pervasive utilization of electronics and social media is normalizing insufficient sleep among children and adolescents.

Sleeping problems are not to be taken lightly, as the National Institutes of Health notes sleep deficiency has been linked to heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, obesity, and depression. Children who are not getting enough sleep may experience difficulty paying attention, which could adversely affect their academic performance, and might be prone to misbehavior. Of course, many of these side effects can be avoided by getting sufficient sleep. With that in mind, adults, parents, children, and adolescents can consider these strategies to get a better night’s sleep, courtesy of the Sleep Foundation.

- **Replace an old mattress.** Old mattresses can be uncomfortable and thus make it harder to fall asleep.
- **Set an appropriate temperature.** The Sleep Foundation advises setting a bedroom temperature thermostat to between 65 and 68 degrees Fahrenheit to prevent feelings of being too hot or too cold when going to bed.
- **Begin to relax 30 minutes before bed.** A pre-bedtime routine focused on relaxation can facilitate sleep. The Sleep Foundation notes activities like quiet reading, low-impact stretching, listening to soothing music, and mindfulness meditation can help you ease into sleep.
- **Exercise each day, but avoid intense activity close to bedtime.** Daily exercise has been found to promote sleep, but intense exercise right before bed can make it hard for the body to settle down.
- **Block out light.** Light exposure adversely affects circadian rhythm, so keep external light out of your bedroom and dim lights as bedtime approaches. Avoiding bright light as you transition to bedtime can contribute to the production of the hormone melatonin, which facilitates sleep.
- **Wake up at the same time each day.** A routine that includes the same wake-up time each day can acclimate the body to a healthy sleep routine.
- **Avoid devices an hour before bed.** Light emitted by tablets, smartphones and laptops can suppress melatonin production, interfering with sleep. Make the hour before bedtime a device-free time.

Insufficient sleep is an emerging issue for people of all ages across the globe. Some simple strategies can be employed to facilitate a better night’s rest.

How seniors can remain physically and mentally active

Growing older is often equated with slowing down. Aging may be characterized as a period of decline marked by an inability to do the things you once did, but recent data indicates otherwise.

According to a report in the journal *Geriatrics*, a far more optimistic reality awaits seniors. Nearly 45 percent of people age 65 and older show measurable improvements in brain health and physical function over time when they take steps to promote physical and mental wellness.

Physical activity

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity per week, supplemented by at least two days of muscle-strengthening exercises. Brisk walking or swimming can improve cardiovascular health and reduce the risk of stroke and hypertension, says the Massachusetts Council on Aging. Incorporating yoga or Tai Chi is vital for fall prevention, as it targets balance and flexibility. The CDC says improving joint mobility and balance can significantly extend the amount of time seniors can live independently. In addition, lifting light weights or using resistance bands helps combat age-related muscle loss -- essential for maintaining metabolic health.

Cognitive advantages

Mental fitness is just as vital to seniors as physical fitness. According to the World Health Organization, routine cognitive stimulation enhances brain capital, delaying the onset of dementia and Alzheimer s. Strategies for effective mental engagement include:

- Learning:** Lifelong learning techniques include picking up a new language or learning an instrument. This helps strengthen neural pathways that allows the brain to reorganize itself even in later decades.
- Play games:** Play isn t just for kids; games like chess or complex puzzles improve problem-solving and memory retention, according to Nixon Adult Daycare in Houston.
- Socialize:** Isolation is a leading risk factor for cognitive decline, says the National Institutes of Health. Group activities like book clubs or community volunteering can offer emotional fulfillment and mental stimulation.

Power of positivity

Findings from a recent Yale University study indicated seniors with a positive outlook on aging were significantly more likely to show physical and mental improvements compared to those with negative perspectives. Psychological resilience is an important tool for seniors to stay healthy.

Movement, social interaction, stimulating activities, and a positive attitude can help seniors maintain overall health.



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Back to School

Cataracts . . . are they preventable?

Vision should be cherished at every stage in life. However, as one ages and vision changes become more profound, it is even more important to stay abreast of what can be done to care for the eyes in the hopes of preventing certain conditions, including cataracts.

Cataracts are the clouding of the eye's natural lenses. The World Health Organization estimates that cataracts affect more than 94 million people globally. Cataracts also account for nearly 45 percent of all blindness cases.

Even though cataracts are considered an unavoidable part of the aging process, some people wonder if they can be prevented. Reedsburg Area Medical Center says that, while one cannot entirely stop the biological aging of the lens, delayed onset and reduced severity of cataracts is possible through targeted lifestyle choices.

According to EyeHealth Northwest, by age 80, more than 90 percent of adults will either have a cataract or have already undergone surgery for them. Technically cataracts cannot be prevented, but these steps can help push cataract development further into later life.

-- **Wear sunglasses with UV protection.** The consensus among experts is that prolonged exposure to ultraviolet B rays accelerates the breakdown of lens proteins. Consistent use of sunglasses that offer 100 percent UV protection can greatly slow this protein degradation. Wraparound frames will block light from the periphery as well as the front.

-- **Lower oxidative stress.** Preventing oxidative stress, a



primary driver of lens opacification, can be achieved through diets rich in antioxidants, says Premier Eye Care of Eastern Idaho. Lutein, zeaxanthin and vitamin C act as shields for the eye. Eye Physicians of Long Beach says the risk of age-related cataracts reduces by around 26 percent for every additional 10 mg of carotenoids added to a person's diet.

-- **Manage diabetes.** The National Institutes of Health says individuals with diabetes face a 63 percent higher likelihood of requiring cataract surgery compared to those without the condition. Managing high blood sugar will prevent sorbitol from depositing in the lenses and causing cloudiness earlier in life.

-- **Quit smoking:** Smoking is a key factor in cataract development, says Optometrists.org. Smokers have a 1.66 times greater risk of developing cataracts than non-smokers because the toxins in tobacco smoke can deplete the body's natural antioxidant stores.

Although it may not be possible to turn off aging and prevent cataracts entirely, cataracts can be delayed and made less impactful through lifestyle changes.

Did you know? adult immunizations

Immunization schedules are often discussed in relation to vaccinating young children, but vaccines also are an important component of health care for adults. Despite that, vaccination rates among adults in the United States are low.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2024 flu vaccination rates among adults were below 50 percent and vaccination rates were below 25 percent for both COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

Adult vaccination rates also are low in Canada, where the 2023 Adult National Immunization Coverage Survey found that just 44 percent of adults received the influenza vaccine during the 2022-23 flu season and just 55 percent of adults age 65 and older received the pneumococcal vaccine, which various public health agencies, including the CDC, recommend all adults over 50 receive.



*Maybe an apple a day
keeps the doctor away...*

*But when you have to go to the doctor,
a book can make the wait fly by!*



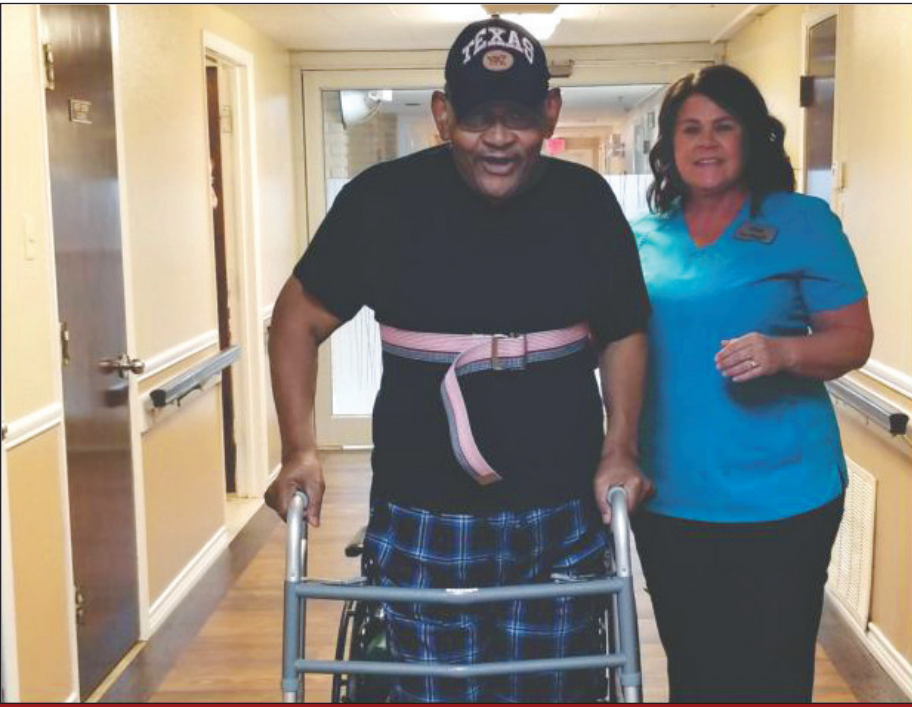
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