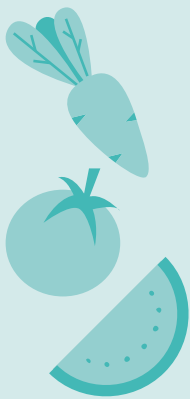




Practical advice on the importance of staying active post Covid-19

This practical guide explains the benefits of keeping physically fit and well and indicates the reasons why exercise is so important for us.

Covid-19 lockdown and quarantine measures have meant loneliness and social isolation have increased for many people. This can have had a serious effect on an individual's physical, mental and social health. Being inactive can also hamper circulation so it is important to stay active and keep your joints moving by simple daily exercises.



Importance of a healthy diet:

During lockdown many of us rediscovered the therapeutic joy of home baking and snacking in between meals, leading to an inevitable increase in weight. Eating a healthy balanced diet and maintaining an appropriate weight for our height is important, as being overweight will put an extra strain on for example the veins in our legs. Losing weight can bring huge benefits and can safely be achieved by reducing the amount of fat, sugars and foods with little or no nutritional value in our diet. Introducing more fruit, vegetables, wholegrains, fish and lean meats is important for seniors and may help prevent leg-related problems in later life.

www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/

Why walking is good for your legs:

The cartilage that cushions the ends of the bones in the knee is subject to deterioration with age. As the cushion wears down, the joint does not function as well and can cause pain in the knee. Ensuring stronger leg muscles through disciplined walking and leg exercises can protect against knee osteoarthritis. Another advantage of adding some lean muscle on the legs is a marked increase in body metabolism, which helps to burn fat off the entire body.



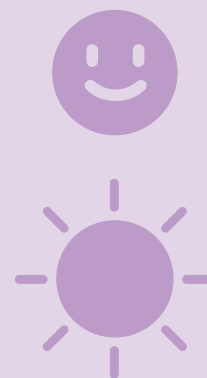
Exercises and walking:



Older people are repeatedly told about the benefits of physical exercise, how it can help with weight loss, lower blood pressure, improve cholesterol levels, lower blood sugar and slow down osteoporosis. Yet many seniors often question whether it is safe to start exercising at an advanced age. Maintaining strength and good mobility is one of the most important ways to ensure you retain your health and independence. In fact, there are few health reasons for not exercising. Chronic diseases such as diabetes or even heart failure, with approval from your GP and/or specialist nurse, need not be a barrier so long as the medical conditions are under control. When done correctly, exercise can actually improve such conditions. Simple activities such as making the bed, dressing and undressing may use 50% of an elderly person's maximal physical capability. This often means they are then too tired to exercise. In other words, their cardiovascular ability (or aerobic capacity) has declined with age, so that exertion beyond a certain level causes a lack of adequate oxygen circulation.

Examples of moderate activities include:

Walking and/or exercise in the fresh air is vitally important for our mind, body and spirit. We must of course adhere to current government guidelines remaining at a safe distance away from people. Walking is one of the simplest and easiest exercises to increase the blood flow in the calf muscles. There are so many reasons why going outside into the fresh air each day is good for us; it can enhance mood and wellbeing, and some people find it eases feelings of anxiety, depression, and stress levels. In addition to enjoying being out and about it is key for good health as exposure to sunlight helps boost Vitamin D, which maintains healthy bones and muscles.



Regular exercise improves the blood circulation in your legs as it activates calf muscles, which will help to push the blood back towards the heart. Seniors should aim to complete at least 150 minutes (2 and a half hours) of moderate activity per week. It is fine and acceptable to experience some discomfort in the legs while exercising, but if you feel any pain, you should seek medical advice from your GP or specialist nurse.

If you find it difficult to walk you can do some gentle ankle exercises while sitting. By making leg exercises an integral part of your daily routine it will bring long-term benefits as strong, healthy legs complement overall wellbeing. This can be achieved by sitting comfortably in your chair and lifting and moving the foot and ankle in a circular motion to the right and then to the left.



Aerobics: gentle aerobics can be increased by different types of aerobic exercise, thereby greatly improving functional ability, maintaining independence and quality of life. More vigorous types of aerobic exercises would be climbing the stairs. As with all exercises it is important to start gradually, proceeding from gentle increasing to moderate and then to vigorous exercise, subject to your doctor/nurse specialist's approval.

It is important to do enough aerobic exercises, but not to overdo it. There are several ways for a person to set down the right amount of endurance exercise. A simple check is the talk-sing test; if you cannot talk comfortably during exercise, you are probably exercising at a too vigorous level. On the other hand, if you can sing a song, you may not really be exercising enough. However, if you have longstanding medical conditions or take medications that change your heart rate, or you are nervous about any form of exercise always check with your doctor/specialist nurse first.



Whatever the activity, you should incorporate an adequate warm-up and stretching routines before starting, and to ensure that you include a cool down and stretching period afterwards. When done correctly, exercise can actually improve some health-related conditions and provide positivity and wellbeing.

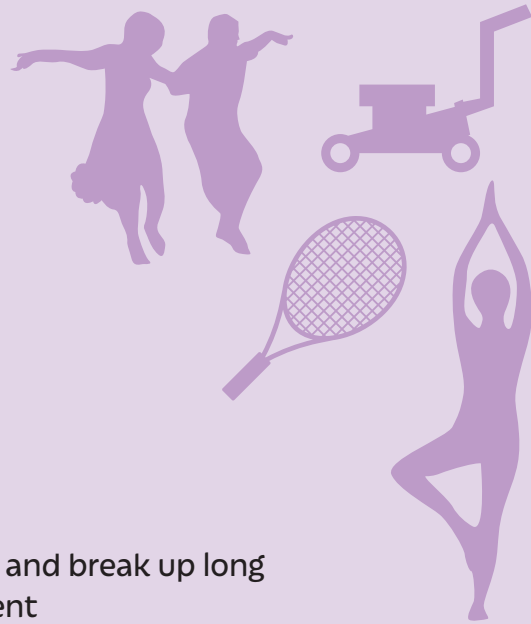
ALWAYS STOP exercising promptly if you have any chest pain, dizziness, and/or severe shortness of breath, extreme fatigue, or pain in your legs and seek help and advice.



By putting into practice, a sensible diet and following a structured exercise plan spread across each day, you will see positive results. Always remember ample fluids should be taken, and extremes of heat or cold should be avoided when exercising.

Examples of moderate activity include:

- Walking
- Dancing
- Pushing a lawn mower
- Doubles tennis
- Activities that improve strength, balance and flexibility twice per week, such as:
 - o Sitting to standing
 - o Yoga/Pilates/Tai Chi
 - o Carrying shopping bags
 - o Working with resistance bands
 - o Reduce time spent sitting or lying down and break up long periods of inactivity with some movement



Speak to your GP if you have any concerns about exercising.

Last but not least: keep active, look after your legs and keep them elevated when sitting for long periods and drink plenty of water to keep hydrated.

Useful websites:

www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/

www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-older-adults/#what-activities-strengthen-muscles

www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/walking-for-health/

www.nhs.uk/conditions/nhs-fitness-studio/

www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/dance-for-fitness/

www.evelo.com/exercises-for-seniors/#stretches

www.evelo.com/exercises-for-seniors/#balance

www.evelo.com/exercises-for-seniors/#cardio

www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/exercise/

www.health.harvard.edu/topics/balance-and-mobility

www.helpguide.org/articles/healthy-living/exercise-and-fitness-as-you-age.htm

familydoctor.org/exercise-seniors/

familydoctor.org/category/prevention-and-wellness/

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