

Fit and over 50

It's a fact: regular exercise helps **fend off ageing** by keeping your body – and mind – supple and healthy. No matter what your age, our guide shows you how to **get fit safely** and **live life to the full...**

Exercise at any time of life is a good thing and, as the saying goes, it's never too late to start. But why is fitness important as you get older?

There are several reasons why keeping fit isn't just a lifestyle priority for the young. For instance, regular exercise helps maintain a healthy heart, keeps your weight down and your joints supple, relieves muscle tension and helps build muscle strength. Exercise also encourages your lungs to function more effectively and avoid conditions such as late-onset diabetes and osteoporosis.

Furthermore, regular exercise improves your circulation and delivers oxygen to all the cells of your body. This is good news, not only for your heart and lungs, but for your brain, too, as medical research has shown that increased oxygen can improve brain functions, including memory. Clinical studies have even shown that exercise can improve your quality of life after a heart attack.

But what about those aches and pains that are commonplace as you get older? Won't exercise make them worse? Well, according to several studies, morning stiffness and painful joints may actually be eased by taking

regular exercise. For instance, there's much clinical evidence to show that gentle exercise can help prevent arthritis, as well as ease your symptoms if you already have it.

Josh Salzmann, fitness expert for women's health website, www.ivillage.co.uk, says, "Fitness is accessible to anyone, at any age. It makes you feel better and helps you live your life to the full."

Start off slowly

The first thing you should do before embarking on an exercise regime is see your doctor for a full check-up and get some advice on the type of exercise you're planning to do. If you're new to fitness, it's very important to ease yourself into it slowly and not take on too much in one go. This will get your heart used to working a little harder and help avoid muscle and joint problems.

Josh emphasises prudence when exercising: "If you haven't exercised before, be patient. Small increments of exercise, together with a healthy diet, will produce great results."

Consider doing around 10 minutes of exercise, three or four times a week, to start with. If you've suffered a heart attack or

other illness, your doctor may suggest less – maybe just three to five minutes of exercise, three times a week. As you become stronger and fitter, you can extend your exercise time – though only with your doctor's permission, especially if you have, or have had, medical problems. Aim for an extra two to three minutes for each session.

● **TIP: Rest days are important for your body, so only exercise for a maximum of five days a week.**

Which exercise?

Keeping fit doesn't necessarily mean dashing off to your nearest gym, sweating your way through punishing weight workouts, or joining a maximum-impact step class. There is a vast range of options available to you – and you don't have to join a gym, though they're worth checking out as some gyms run classes geared specifically for the over-50s.

● **TIP: Whichever type of exercise you choose, make sure you pick one that doesn't put a strain on your joints.**

Fitness is accessible to anyone and at any age

Everyday exercises

If you still think fitness isn't for you, here are some activities you can fit into your everyday life that won't feel like exercise at all...

- Go for a walk at lunchtime or take the dog for a walk.
- Do some gardening.
- Cycle to the shops.
- Dance to music as you do the housework.
- Walk to the next bus stop when you're heading out, and get off a stop earlier on your way home.
- Play with your grandchildren.
- Take up a hobby such as badminton, golf or bowls.

Walking



Walking is something lots of people can do and it fits effortlessly into any lifestyle. Just think how many times you walk to and from the shops or train station. You may not think walking is a worthwhile exercise, but if you stride along at a brisk pace, it has many benefits, such as...

- Strengthening the heart and lungs.
- Protecting against heart disease.
- Reducing blood pressure by giving the heart an aerobic workout.
- Helping to prevent osteoporosis and back pain.
- Tones and strengthens your calves, thighs, hips, abdominal muscles and lower back.

Maggie Humphreys, co-author of *Step It Out: The 30-Day Walking And Weight-Loss Workout* (Aurum Press, £9.99), says, "Walking benefits people who haven't done a great deal of exercise, and there are tremendous physiological benefits."

If you're new to exercise, Maggie recommends that you start off slowly.

"Begin at a gentle pace – say two to three miles an hour – for around 10 to 15 minutes, three to four times a week, and you can build up from there," she says. "Eventually you should be aiming to walk at a pace of around three to four miles an hour."

● **TIP: Several mini walks spread throughout the day are just as good as one long one.**

Take care

Any exercise that causes you pain or discomfort should be stopped immediately. Try a more gentle form of exercise until your muscles are stronger and your fitness levels have improved. Always consult your doctor before starting any type of exercise programme and make sure you remember to rest well between workouts. Josh says, "You don't get stronger when you train, but when you recover."

Aerobics



Cycling, walking, running, stair climbing and rowing are all forms of aerobic exercise – but what about those aerobic exercise classes, such as step, circuit training and spinning – aren't they just for young, fit people? Not at all, so long as you go at your own pace and don't push yourself too hard. However, if you don't feel fit or confident enough to join in, most fitness centres run at least one aerobics class a week that's geared specifically towards the needs of the over-50s. Check with your nearest gym or fitness centre for details.

Aerobic exercise uses large muscle groups rhythmically and continuously over a set period of time. Again, it's a great cardiovascular workout that improves heart rate, breathing, stamina and muscle tone. Experts recommend that you do 20 to 30 minutes of aerobic exercise three to four times a week.

● **TIP: Why not try something different, such as tai chi or a dance class? You'll have so much fun, you won't even realise you're keeping fit! Ask your local fitness centre for details about classes.**

Swimming



Taking to the pool is one of the best forms of exercise you can do – at any age. It promotes strength, stamina and mobility, together with improved cardiovascular fitness. What's more, as water buoyancy supports most of your weight, swimming makes you use your large muscle groups without impacting on your joints. This is especially good news for arthritis sufferers.

Robina Lloyd, spokesperson for the organisation, Arthritis Care, agrees: "Swimming really is great, as the water takes the weight off painful and swollen joints. You're more mobile in the water and people with arthritis really need to keep moving – it's a case of use it or lose it – and swimming keeps both the body and the joints supple."

For added variety, you could try water aerobics. This is a fun way of keeping fit, and because the water supports your weight, you don't strain your back or knees. A great cardio workout, water aerobics can burn off up to 300 calories per class. Ask at your local swimming pool for details of classes.

● **TIP: To make the most of your swimming workout, vary your strokes. But check with your doctor first, as the breaststroke may not be suitable if you have knee problems.**



Running



Running is great for conditioning your heart and lungs, but it should be approached with caution. Steve Thomas – a freelance personal trainer for Global Models Coaching and Soho Athletic Gyms – usually advises against it for most clients aged 50-plus: “Running is a high-impact exercise that places strain on the joints and, if you have high or low blood pressure, diabetes, breathing difficulties or postural problems, then you shouldn’t do it.”

But this type of advice isn’t for everyone. The world’s oldest marathon runner, 89-year-old Jenny Wood Allen, proves that running can be possible for people of any age. Although she only started running at 71, last year she won a Help The Aged NOJO (Not Old Just Older) Award for Outstanding Achievement in Sport. She’s now run over 30 marathons, and has even started up her own running club.

Jenny recommends starting off slowly: “Remember to creep before you walk and walk before you run – build up gradually.”

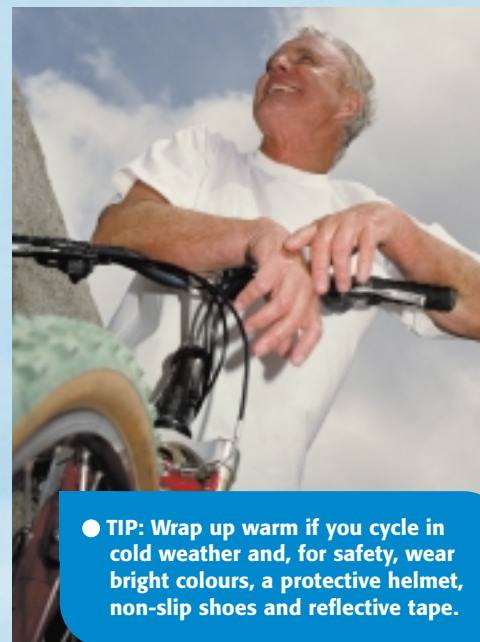
Stretching exercises are also important as they help avoid painful muscle and joint injuries. Jenny says, “You must do warm-up exercises before running and warm-down exercises when you finish.”

But the golden rule is don’t push yourself too hard too quickly, as your body needs time to adapt.

Here are some tips to set you on the right track...

- Do run more slowly – and over a shorter distance than you think you should.
- Do run more often than you think you should (four times a week).
- Do stop running immediately if you experience any strong pain or feel out of breath.

So, if you think you’re fit enough to run, check with your doctor first, and invest in a very good pair of running shoes.



● **TIP:** You should be able to talk comfortably when you’re running – slow down if you’re short of breath and remember to alternate between walking and running.

Cycling



Cycling is another excellent form of aerobic exercise and you can ride a bike anywhere, at any time – to the shops, to work and back, or simply for enjoyment. There is one caveat, however: be mindful of your back. Steve agrees: “When cycling, you tend to keep your back in a very stationary, upright position, so for people with back problems, cycling can become uncomfortable.”

So listen to your body – as soon as you start to feel stiff or achy, stop cycling.

For maximum results and safety, set the cycle’s seat to a height that’s right for you – you should be able to put your foot down on the ground for balance and support when you stop, and be able to stretch your legs when you push on the pedal, with a slight bend in the knee when the pedal is at its lowest point.

If you’re worried about cycling outdoors, or you have back problems, many fitness centres have special exercise bikes that support the back.

● **TIP:** Wrap up warm if you cycle in cold weather and, for safety, wear bright colours, a protective helmet, non-slip shoes and reflective tape.



Start off slowly:
Creep before
you walk and walk
before you **Run**

Exercise and osteoporosis

Osteoporosis literally means ‘porous bones’ and is a condition caused by a lack of calcium and minerals essential for the maintenance of strong, dense, healthy bones. Originally thought of as a disease only affecting women, men too are being increasingly diagnosed as having osteoporosis.

The good news is that keeping fit can help prevent osteoporosis, as regular exercise can help increase bone density. The best type of exercises for preventing osteoporosis include activities that stretch, compress, bend and twist the bones, such as gardening, housework, walking, jogging, dancing – even running up and down the stairs will count, as will cycling, swimming and yoga.

If you already have osteoporosis, consult your doctor for advice before starting any new type of activity.

Contacts

care

New to contact lenses? Your pharmacist can give you advice on how to **keep them clean** and disinfected. **Follow these steps** to safer, bacteria-free lenses...

Thanks to kinder-on-the-eye material, more people than ever are ditching their specs in favour of contact lenses. There are basically two types of contacts: soft lenses and rigid gas-permeable ones. Common types of soft lenses include daily disposable and 30-day continuous wear – the latter accounts for almost 99 percent of all lenses sold. Daily disposable lenses don't need cleaning as you just throw them away each day after use. But if you're one of the majority who use continuous-wear soft lenses or gas-permeable ones, you'll know they need care, cleaning and storage before you eventually dispose of them.

There are specific care instructions for lenses – your optician can give you directions when you buy them – but so long as you follow this simple three-step plan, your lenses should stay clean and in good condition, meaning your peepers will be too!

Step 1: care for your hands

Keeping your hands clean whenever you handle your contact lenses is an absolute must, as this helps prevent bacteria from getting on the lenses and into your eyes.

- Keep your fingernails trimmed and clean.
- Wash and dry your hands thoroughly when taking your contacts out of the case and fitting them, then wash and dry them again when you remove your lenses.
- Always use mild or non-perfumed soaps, and avoid any containing cold cream, lotion or deodorants. (Your eyes can be irritated and your lenses damaged if they come into contact with lotions or cosmetics.)

Step 2: care for your lenses

Thorough cleaning is vital if you're to remove all the secretions, mucus and other deposits that attach themselves to your poor lenses. Fortunately, this has become much easier over the past few years, thanks to the introduction of multi-purpose cleaning solutions, which are more convenient than using separate cleaner and disinfectant solutions. However, using the latter has recently been proved to clean lenses more thoroughly (see 'Is your solution strong enough?').

- Never clean your lenses with tap water – or any other non-sterile substance – and don't water down your cleaning solution.
- Check that your solution hasn't passed its expiry date.
- When you're not wearing lenses, keep them floating in solution in your case. They should never be left out of solution for more than a few minutes.
- Extend the life span of your lenses and reduce the risk of an eye infection by cleaning and disinfecting them whenever you take them out.
- Clean your lenses by gently rubbing and rinsing them in fresh solution.
- Use a clean area to handle your lenses, and use only your fingertips, as nails can cause damage – never use tweezers or other tools.
- Try not to use perfumes, hairspray or other aerosol products when wearing your contacts. If you do, keep your eyes closed until the spray has dispersed.

Step 3: care for your case

Looking after your lens case is just as important as looking after the lenses themselves.

- Clean your case daily with a fresh, sterile rinsing solution – never use ordinary tap water – and allow it to dry naturally.
- No matter how diligent you are at cleaning your case, pesky bacteria can still get inside, so replace your case with a new one around every three months.
- Never re-use the solution in your case. Every time you store your lenses, clean the case first and fill it with fresh solution.

Is your solution strong enough?

Latest research confirms the importance of good lens hygiene. Austrian scientists have found that many cleaning solutions aren't strong enough to kill one particularly nasty bug that causes eye ulcers. They recommend using a two-step solution that contains 0.6 hydrogen peroxide and keeping your lenses' case sterilised by boiling or microwaving them. Ask your pharmacist for details.