

## **Exercise For Seniors** *By Joe Stein, President*



Attention all seniors! If you are still searching for the Fountain of Youth, I have some good news and some bad news. The bad news is that the Fountain is a mirage created by a youth-oriented consumer culture. Now the good news: the elixir for successful aging is real and available to all participants in the game of life. Whether you are 50 or 90, healthy and fit, healthy and unfit, physically restricted or even frail, you can improve the quality of your life—now and in years to come.

A study done by the US Department of Health and Human Services noted that improved healthcare has helped to increase lifespan. Regular exercise, on the other hand, helps increase “health span,” which is the ability to live an active, independent life. Muscle mass, cardiovascular capability, flexibility, balance and bone density all decline as we age. These changes, combined with diminishment of visual acuity, and slowing metabolism often lead to falls, fractures, diabetes, osteoporosis, depression, high blood pressure, sprains, strains and the heartbreak of not living the way we used to. As dark as this cloud of aging appears, there is a platinum lining. Numerous studies prove older adults can reverse most of the effects of aging by engaging in a properly designed program of strength training and cardiovascular conditioning.

Improved balance and coordination, elevated energy levels, reduced body fat, improved efficiency of the heart and lungs, reduced blood pressure, improved insulin action, increased range of motion about the body’s joints and elevated mood are just some of the benefits seniors can receive by engaging in exercise. In fact, there is so much information about these benefits that my “exercise for seniors” Google Internet search revealed over 49,000 hits.

Now let’s get real. Research from Harvard Medical School, the US Department of Health and Human Service and the American Council on Exercise is fine, but here is what some senior clients are saying about how exercise has benefited them.

Trainer Joe: Why did you start to exercise, Joan?

Joan: (From Middletown): “I have been exercising since my 40s to keep my figure...classes in Elaine Powers. As I got into my 50s and 60s, I realized I needed more focus. I want to keep from going to ‘Hell in a hand basket.’ I enjoy having a toned body and flat abs. By the way, my 90-year old mother has begun to exercise in her home with a trainer and it has greatly improved her mobility.”

Trainer Joe: Tony, have you been exercising since your 40s, too?

Tony (60s from West Long Branch): “I used to jog a lot. But as I got older, injuries and loss of flexibility caused me to slow down and stop. Also, jogging did not help with

balance, coordination and weight control as much as I had hoped. I really enjoy the North Beach Diet, so gaining muscle to boost my metabolism is important.”

Trainer Joe: Do you mean the “South Beach Diet?”

Tony: “No, I do exactly the opposite. I love pasta, wine, bagels and cake; I don’t eat meat. I would weigh a lot more if I didn’t train with you.”

Trainer Joe: Let’s plan on talking about your nutrition next session, Tony.

Trainer Joe: Cora, you started exercising to address some special requirements, didn’t you?

Cora (60s from Little Silver): “I have several old injuries from skiing and tennis. Working out in gyms made them worse. Besides, I knew I wasn’t skilled to deal with it on my own. The fear of reinjury caused me to stop. Then my energy level declined. Since starting personal training, I have a lot more energy and stamina for being a grandma, cooking, laundry and shopping...just living life. My old injuries are still there, but they do not stop me from doing the things I want.”

Trainer Joe: Gretchen, speaking of grandchildren, you have quite a few, don’t you?

Gretchen (60s from West Long Branch) “Oh yes, I have ten! They really keep me busy. There’s no way I could keep up with them without the strength and stamina exercise gives me. It is also a great stress reliever, a nice benefit. Exercise is as good for my head as it is for my body.”

Trainer Joe: Bob, what got you started?

Bob (70s from Middletown): “Basically I’m lazy. Exercise is too strenuous and requires too much discipline. I honor commitment, discipline and motivation as ideals, but I shutter at the thought of them in practice. We all know exercise is good for us, but I could never do it without a trainer. Since I gave this interview, do I still have to do push ups and lunges?”

Trainer Joe: Weren’t we just talking about commitment? Thank you all for sharing your thoughts.

As you can see, seniors have a wide range of backgrounds, motivations and levels of fitness. No matter where they came from, exercise has allowed them to arrive at the same destination: a better quality of life. In a few years, I will reexamine this topic and perhaps interview you...if you have time in between housework, horseback riding, grandchildren, golf, travel, tennis, mowing the lawn and training for a marathon.

---

Joe Stein, B.S., M.B.A., is a certified personal trainer, weight management and lifestyle consultant and owner of Renaissance Fitness & Wellness. Call 732.345.5151 or e-mail [Joe@RenaissanceFitness.com](mailto:Joe@RenaissanceFitness.com) with questions or to receive a complimentary fitness consultation and session.