

BUSINESS & HEALTH
**Sports Medicine
& Orthopedics**

Exercising through middle age and beyond

Aging naturally causes a decrease in athletic prowess and healing ability, while increasing the vulnerability to injury.

Some Baby Boomer fitness buffs are reluctant to heed what their body is telling them. A 1999 U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission report shows Baby Boomers' sports injuries increased 33 percent during the 1990s.

The condition is dubbed Boomer-itis.

"Baby Boomers are more active as a generation. Their bodies will show more wear and tear, so they'll have more aches and pains," says Joseph Milet, MD, of Ohio Orthopedic Center of Excellence and Riverside Methodist Hospital.

"As we age, mentally we think we can do the same things we used to, but often we can't without negative consequences," says Thomas Kovack, DO, of Doctors Hospital and



Thomas Kovack, DO, Doctors Hospital, helps a "baby boomer" aged patient work through her aches and pains so

Aging is not a green light to abandon exercise, though.

"It's good for all ages. Exercise increases cardiovascular health, bone health, and even mental health. It also can help reduce cholesterol and blood pressure levels," says Barry Malinowski, MD, Anthem's medical director

Exercise smart

With advances in sports medicine, many people can continue to be active as they age. The key is learning techniques that acknowledge the natural changes to the body.

"One of the biggest mistakes I see is not stretching. As we age, our bodies need to warm up more than when we were young," Kovack says.

Vary the workout, too, to avoid using the same muscles repeatedly. "You want some strength exercises, so use weight machines or exercise bands. Biking, swimming and walking build endurance. Stretching helps with flexibility. I tell patients to focus on form, not formidability, meaning how fast and far they go or how heavy a weight they can lift," says Randy Wroble, MD of SportsMedicine Grant and Grant Medical Center.

"You don't need to jog 10 miles a day to get a good aerobic workout. Walking, cycling, and swimming are healthy activities that aren't hard on aging joints," Malinowski says.

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Weekend warriors are particularly vulnerable to injury. "A big mistake is doing something suddenly you're not accustomed to. You cannot take muscles and tendons that aren't accustomed to strenuous activity, put them through the paces and expect not to have injuries," says Joseph Ruane, DO, medical director of the McConnell Spine, Sport & Joint Center.

Instead, ease into activity. "Slowly work into getting your body more active. Consistency is the key," Mileti says.

Increase activity by 10 percent at a time, rather than by big leaps in duration or weight.

Exercise 30 minutes regularly all year. "In Ohio, that's an issue with our weather. People get hurt in the spring after they've been couch potatoes all winter," Wroble says.

Malinowski suggests visiting with a primary care physician before undertaking strenuous activity. And, of, course, wear the appropriate safety gear.

Prevent injuries

When injuries do occur, the traditional treatment is rest, heat or ice depending on the injury, use of anti-inflammatories and rehabilitation.

"Listen to your body. If it hurts, stop. If it swells or is otherwise hurt, see your doctor," Wroble says.

"If you play through the pain, you're at risk for future injuries because of wear and tear. Don't ignore it. The longer you have a problem or injury, the harder it is to fix," Kovack says.

Previous injuries become more profound in later life, especially if they're not treated at the time.

Ruane says treating Baby Boomers can be challenging. "It's their 'fix it now' mentality. The body just doesn't work that way, particularly as it ages. No pain, no gain is not the motto for aging Baby Boomers."