



## Five Tips for Masters' Athletes

Physical activity is an important part of a healthy lifestyle at any age, but older adults can reap extra benefits -- as Connecticut Masters' Games participants may be able to attest. Incorporating physical activity into your daily routine can lower your risk for many diseases and may improve your quality of life by enhancing flexibility, stamina and energy. Exercising can bring mental health benefits, too, due in large part to the mood-boosting effects of endorphins, a neurotransmitter . or brain chemical . that is released during exercise.

While most people, regardless of age or their current physical condition, can benefit from exercise, it's important to remember that working out is not one size fits all. Knowing what's right for you can help maximize the positive results and reduce your risk of injury. Here are five tips to help keep you on the right track.

1. **Consider your overall health.** If you have a preexisting condition, such as diabetes or heart disease, or if it's been a while since you've exercised, talk to your doctor to get medical clearance before beginning an exercise program or taking up a new sport. You should also talk with your doctor if you currently exercise but have recently received a new health diagnosis.
2. **Pay attention to your body.** Simply put, if something feels wrong, stop what you're doing. Symptoms such as acute pain or extreme shortness of breath are your body's way of telling you that you've pushed it too hard. Take a break, and when you feel better, slowly ease back in to the activity. See your doctor if the problem persists.
3. **Set goals.** Some people find that setting goals helps them stay motivated and engaged with an exercise plan. It can also be a good way to track your progress so you know when it's time to switch up your routine (see tip 4). Losing weight or increasing strength are good physical goals . but consider other kinds of goals, too. This could include reducing stress levels, boosting your mood, or meeting new friends through an exercise class or sports team. Think about what's important to you and your health needs when setting goals, and start small. Specific, attainable goals can help keep you motivated. For example, aim to lose 1-2 pounds per week instead of striving for a 50-pound weight loss.
4. **Switch up your routine.** Doing the same physical activity all the time can be monotonous and can even increase your risk of injury by potentially overworking some parts of your body while ignoring others. In general, older adults should focus on four main areas of exercise: cardio/endurance, strength training, balance and flexibility. If you're used to walking every morning or are an avid runner, consider adding strength training exercises, such as lifting weights or using elastic resistance bands. Doing yoga or tai-chi a few times a week can help round out your regimen. Switching up your routine can also help if you've reached a plateau with weight loss or other fitness goals.
5. **Have fun.** Exercise should be something you enjoy. Find ways to incorporate favorite pastimes such as listening to music, being outdoors and getting together with friends to make exercise much more than a routine. Look for opportunities for friendly competition on the tennis court or golf course . or explore a new part of your hometown with a bike ride or leisurely run. It's easier to live a healthier life through exercise when you're having fun.

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