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Aussie seniors exercising more... and beating pain

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Baby boomers are now getting almost as much activity and exercise as 18-24 year-olds, a new survey has found.

And 22% of 50-64 year-olds surveyed say their pain is actually reduced with exercise and activity.

The new survey of 1205 Australian adults investigated activity and attitudes towards fitness and physical activity, comparing 18-24 year olds and 50-64 year olds.



Undertaken by independent research agency Galaxy Research, the survey included 402 18-24 year olds and 803 50-64 year olds. The research was commissioned by GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), the makers of Panadol Osteo and Voltaren.

It found that overall, 50-64 year olds are active for almost as many hours (average 14.07) as younger Australians (average 16.25 hours) on a weekly basis.

And 60-64 year olds are averaging 14.73 hours per week – just 1.5 hours behind 18-24 year olds.

One in five (22%) 50-64 year-olds surveyed admit to getting strong aches and joint pains, but they are unlikely to let this get in the way of their daily regimes.

And 37% of 50-59 year olds and 43% of 60-64 year olds said they do not let their aches or pains get in the way of being active.

Household chores are exercise friends

Also, 22% of 50-64 year olds say their pain is reduced with exercise and activity, while 29% of 50-54 year-olds feel the same way.

The results found regular housework – vacuuming, tidying up, making beds and gardening are the exercise friends of the 50+ and the secret to their success.

Baby boomers estimated they complete an hour everyday (7.3 hours per week) of general chores and housework – close to double that of their 18-24 counterparts (just 4.8 hours per week).

When it comes to “planned” exercise the “go to” for the over 50s is walking versus millennials who, unsurprisingly, are more into the gym and running.

The motivations for younger Australians for programed exercise are more for looks than health.

However, older Australians are twice as likely to see the benefits of planned exercise as being for mobility (65%) and keeping the joints moving rather than looks (29%).

“This survey confirms that Aussie baby boomers are embracing the joy of movement and keeping up activity levels, which is great news for their health,” says Dr Bill Sukala, a leading exercise physiologist and nutritionist.

Maintaining activity levels is extremely important

“Movement is essential to maintaining mobility and mobility is important to pain management associated with ailments, like joint pain or osteoarthritis that impact many older Australians and are often associated with not being able to move.

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"It's great that older Australians aren't taking ageing lying down. Maintaining activity levels as we age is extremely important to health and wellbeing, particularly as the incidence of health issues like obesity and osteoarthritis rise."

Dr Sukala says most seniors now recognise that physical activity is good for them.

"The human body is meant to move. When seniors increase their range of motion and flexibility they can significantly decrease the amount of pain they experience.

"They are now thinking 'yes, it hurts but I know if I don't do anything I'm going to feel a heck of a lot worse.'"

Healthier lifestyle

And when seniors are increase their exercise levels it usually leads to a healthier lifestyle – they stop smoking, consume less alcohol and improve their diet.

"They not only lose weight, but they have an easier time keeping it off," says Dr Sukala.

Weight reduction means less gravitational load on joints which helps to relieve arthritis pain and stiff joints.

And with an increase in physical activity for older Australians we will begin to see less obesity and related diseases such as diabetes, arthritis and osteoarthritis.

Dr Sukala says it is encouraging to note that more seniors keep active with housework.

"We shouldn't be viewing housing chores as drudgery," he says. "It is an opportunity for movement and while many people don't like washing dishes or their car or cleaning the garage – the fact you can do it is actually a blessing.

"You don't appreciate the ability to move until you lose it."

Six tips to help maintain a physical lifestyle

Dr Sukala offers the following tips to help baby boomers maintain a more physical lifestyle and exercise regime:

1. Include exercise in your daily routine

This may include "structured" exercise like going to the gym or yoga classes or "incidental" movement like household chores or playing with grandchildren in the park throwing a ball.

2. Make exercise fun

If you enjoy it, you are far more likely to stick to an exercise routine

3. Work within your pain free range of motion

Ease into an exercise routine. A 'no pain, no gain' attitude can sometimes do more harm than good.

4. Make sure you warm up before exercising

Get a gradual warm up before beginning exercise. It is important to let your joints warm up before physical activity.

5. A good social connection helps

It is usually better to exercise with a group, rather than by yourself. Try to exercise with people you enjoy spending time with. You may be exercising for an hour and not notice it if you're engaging in great conversation.

6. Allow adequate recovery time

It is important to exercise, but it is also important to get adequate recovery time. People don't need to be doing extremely high intensity exercises every day. You should plan your week to include perhaps two hard days of exercise with a lighter workouts in between.

Dr Sukala says it's always advisable to consult with a medical professional before beginning a new exercise program – particularly if you have any medical issues such as high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, arthritis, impaired blood sugar levels or diabetes.

Dr Bill Sukala ... 'movement is essential'

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