

April 2009

## When Lifting Gets Harder with Age



If lifting seems harder as you grow older, it is not that the things you are lifting are heavier. Your aging body may be at fault. Even healthy people typically lose a little muscle strength each year, a result of the normal effects of aging, less physical activity or both.

Studies have shown that the loss of strength starts at about age 55, with muscle strength diminishing by 15% per decade after 50. A

marked decline in the testosterone and growth hormone after about age 60 causes strength levels to fall more rapidly, independent of training. The reduction of these hormones shifts the balance between muscle protein synthesis (anabolism) and protein breakdown (catabolism). The resulting decreased strength is due to atrophy of muscle fibers. After 70 years of age, the rate of decline in muscle strength climbs to 30%. Often the result of lower activity levels, this loss of strength makes us more vulnerable to falls and overall loss of mobility.

The good news is that there is ample evidence that exercise—strength or resistance training, in particular—can slow this decline. When you push against great resistance, the burning feeling you experience is a sign of muscle damage. When the muscle heals from that damage, it is stronger than before. One study even found that **strength training may actually reverse the aging process at the molecular level of muscles**. And, say experts, you are never too old to start exercising. Even frail elders in their 90s have gained tremendous ground in muscle size and strength through appropriate exercise programs. A balanced program also includes aerobic activities and exercises to enhance balance and increase endurance and flexibility.

We can help you put together a realistic individualized exercise program and set short- and long-term goals. Through exercise, you can become more active, stay independent and carry out everyday activities, such as climbing stairs and carrying groceries.

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## Helping Your Child Prepare to Pitch for Little League



**A**s your child prepares for the spring baseball season, your first concern should be helping him or her prevent injury. Most injuries to pitchers come from three sources: **overuse, poor throwing mechanics** and **improper conditioning**.

In fact, Little League baseball has become so concerned about youth pitching injuries that they have developed pitch count regulations to protect young arms. Varying with the age of the player, these regulations limit the

number of pitches thrown in competition, the type of pitches allowed and the frequency of pitching. You can help your child by seeing that these regulations are followed.

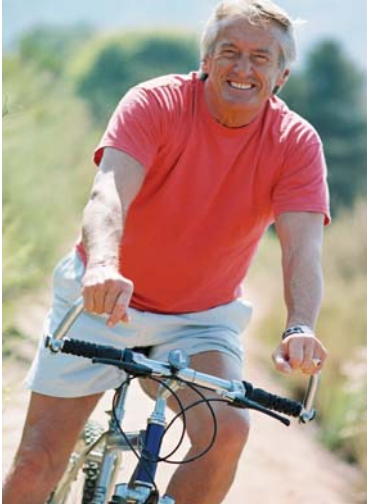
More importantly, an age-appropriate conditioning program can prepare young athletes to compete more safely. We can develop a conditioning program that addresses core strength, agility and stamina, while providing enough variety to keep it fun.

Because most of a pitcher's strength comes not from the shoulder but from the legs, **we will recommend exercises to strengthen the leg muscles**. Bulking up arm and shoulder muscles can actually be harmful to a young pitcher. Other exercises will address **core muscles** that lie deep within the body, **distributing forces applied to the spine and keeping it stable so that the explosive power needed in pitching can be transferred to the upper body**. These exercises should be started under professional direction because performing them correctly requires some coaching.

A complete conditioning program will supplement core strengthening with **stretching and balance exercises** to improve agility and cardiovascular workouts to increase stamina. We can design an exercise program for you, so you and your child can work out together. You will feel healthier, your child will stay motivated and you will spend quality time together.

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## Using Exercise to Reduce Arthritic Knee Pain



**W**ith arthritis, knee joints can be painful and may frequently ache. Fortunately, exercise can help you to relieve pain and improve your mobility. While moving a stiff joint may sound counterproductive, health professionals agree that movement can help to reduce arthritic knee pain. If you suffer from arthritis pain in the knees, exercise can **alleviate joint stiffness; build endurance and flexibility; remove joint stress; strengthen muscles around the joints** so your body will be able to better support and protect knee joints; and **improve overall fitness**.

People with knee pain due to arthritis can begin with 30 minutes of exercise, three times per week. Types of exercise that tend to benefit those with arthritis include walking, swimming, cycling and yoga. Even if you cannot do a full 30 minutes, we can make suggestions about how to break your exercise routine down into smaller, more manageable, parts. Even brief bouts of movement and exercise can keep the joints fluid and healthy.

The mood benefits of exercise are particularly important for people who suffer from arthritic knee pain. Coping with reduced mobility and pain can be depressing, which means that when exercise releases endorphins—nature’s “feel good” chemicals—you feel more positive.

**Although exercise has many benefits for arthritic knee pain, you should still use caution.** If you experience pain after exercising, it probably means that you did too much. If that occurs, ice your knees while making sure you take time out to rest. Exercising under our guidance is important to prevent injury and ensure that you avoid excessive, strenuous activity. In this way, you can reap the benefits of exercise while relieving pain and feeling better about yourself.

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## Gardening After a Colles Fracture



**P**erhaps you fell on the ice in January and suffered a Colles fracture, then wore a cast for two months. Can you resume gardening this spring, and should you protect your wrist if you do?

A Colles fracture is the most common of several conditions that might be called a “**broken wrist.**” Named for Irish surgeon and anatomist Dr. Abraham Colles, who first described it in 1814, the fracture is located

at the distal end (wrist) of the radius, the larger of two bones that stretch from elbow to wrist. A Colles fracture usually occurs when a person uses the hands to stop the body from lurching forward in a car crash, or slips on the ice and instinctively uses the hands to break the fall and keep his or her face from hitting the ground.

Physical therapy is one component of recovery from a Colles fracture. We can prescribe exercises to improve your circulation, reduce swelling and ease discomfort, and enable you to regain movement, strength, flexibility, coordination and function of your wrist. We can also recommend ways to prevent future injuries.

You should be able to begin gardening in the spring if you meet the following conditions:

- **you have been faithfully performing both range-of-motion and strengthening exercises since your cast was removed;**
- **your wrist feels close to normal;** and
- **you are comfortable wearing a wrist splint to help limit motion and prevent strain when you spade or shovel.**

During your first forays into the garden after physical therapy, you may experience some stiffness and even pain. Such feelings are normal and may last a year or two past the date of the fracture. If you are older than 50 years of age, have osteoarthritis or received the fracture in a high-impact mishap such as a car crash, some stiffness might linger permanently.

While most people regain use of their wrist and hand after a Colles fracture, exercise and physical therapy can help you recover more quickly and more fully. Seeing us for an individualized treatment plan and performing your exercises regularly will get you back to gardening comfortably very soon.

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## Fitting Exercise Into Your Daily Schedule



**R**esearch has consistently shown that exercise produces a number of benefits, ranging from improved mood to better strength and cardiovascular health. However, what time of day is the best for exercising?

Some people find that a morning workout fits into their schedule and keeps them energized for the rest of the day. Others prefer working out in the afternoon or evening, when they find it helps reduce stress and tension after a long workday. Ultimately, fitting exercise into your day is the important priority, regardless of the time you choose to do it.

There are a number of components for a healthy, balanced exercise routine. A good place to start is to define the goals you hope to achieve through exercise. These goals might relate to improving the function of a specific area of the body after injury or illness. Other goals include

- **weight loss,**
- **increased strength,**
- **better fitness for sports,**
- **improved heart health** or
- **stronger bones.**

Rather than trying to sort through all of the information—and misinformation—available about exercise, we can design a routine especially for you. Recommended exercises will include such components as **cardiovascular fitness, strength and muscle endurance, flexibility and coordination,** and **power and agility.**

With exercise providing significant benefits, the most important thing is simply to get moving, whatever time of day you choose to work out! Thirty or more minutes a day of exercise will encourage a strong, healthy body and improved well-being. Share your health goals and concerns with us so we can formulate a fitness plan you can perform at the time of day best suited to your schedule and needs.