

What Exercises Are Suitable for Me at My Age?

Exercising is an important part of healthy living – it can improve cardiovascular fitness and muscle tone, and help prevent chronic diseases such as heart disease or diabetes. But what kind of exercises should we be doing at our particular stage of life? Senior Consultant Orthopaedic Specialist DR ANG CHIA LIANG runs through some of the best options.



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Children and adolescents

are generally able to commence all forms of standard exercise, such as swimming, running, racket sports and team sports. However, there are a few conditions parents should keep in mind. Flat feet is very common, and while many cases will autocorrect as the child grows, it may still cause pain over the feet; if so, excessive running and jumping activities should be avoided. The same goes for children with knock knees. Adolescents who frequently feel aches and pains after exercise or who frequently sprain their joints may have a condition called Generalised Ligamentous Laxity; they should undertake more muscle-strengthening exercises. Scoliosis is a curved spine condition that can cause back pain; adolescents with this condition should do stretching exercises and avoid gym lifting exercises.

Young adults (20 to 40 years old) are usually at the peak of their body condition and are suited to undertake any form of exercise as long as they don't experience any pain. This can include strenuous activities such as HIIT, long-distance running, racket sports, rock climbing and more. A common concern is whether excessive strenuous exercises may cause your body to wear out sooner – for example, marathon running or long hours of racket sports. While this is still up for debate, there is some evidence that marathon running may place excessive stress on the knees for many people, and this can turn out to have future negative effects on the knees.

Middle-aged adults (40 to 65 years old) would typically have developed some wear-and-tear in their joints already, so they should consider less impactful exercises, such as swimming, yoga, Pilates, cycling and a reduced amount of running. They should also be more vigilant to pain or symptoms of discomfort. For example, knee pain felt during or after running may indicate significant damage in the knee cartilage. An episodic sharp shoulder pain in certain positions of the arm may indicate a condition called Impingement of the tendons. If you experience such symptoms, the best approach is to seek medical attention.

Older people (above 65 years old) should focus on exercises such as general body and joint stretching and static muscle strengthening. To do stretching, it's important to hold your joint in the stretched position for 5 to 10 seconds each time to maintain the stretch, and repeat it 10 to 20 times. An elastic band is helpful, especially for reaching the feet. You could also use a light dumb-bell (1kg, for example) for shoulder muscle strengthening, and do half-squat exercises for lower limb muscle strengthening. Walking, swimming and tai chi are also suitable for this age group.

As always, if you're commencing a new exercise, ease into it by starting at a lower intensity and then gradually increasing the intensity. If you experience joint pain or aches that persist beyond a few days, or that are recurrent, do seek a medical opinion.