

WHAT ARE THE BEST EXERCISES FOR OLDER ADULTS?



Older adults who want to stay physically active as they age have lots of options and opportunities, says Palm Beach orthopedic surgeon Dr. Robert J. Avino – as long as they pay attention to their bodies and follow some time-tested advice about preserving and protecting their ever-important knees and hips.



He should know. Dr. Avino is a board-certified, fellowship-trained surgeon with Palm Beach Orthopaedic Institute who specializes in robotic hip and knee replacement at Jupiter Medical Center.

He offers advice to seniors who want to continue pursuing sports and activities that they've enjoyed all their lives – or who are seeking advice about switching to other activities that are less likely to lead to pain, overuse injuries or discomfort as their bodies age.

"It's really low-impact activities that are most helpful," says Dr. Avino. "Lots of patients want to stay in shape or are trying to return to physical activities that they pursued earlier in life."

Start slowly, ease into activity

No matter which activity seniors choose, they need to remember a key tenet of engaging in sports of any kind: "Make sure you warm up before any activity so that you can prevent injury, whether you're playing pickleball, tennis, golf or some other sport," he says.

If you haven't exercised or worked out regularly, start a new routine slowly and ease into it to give your body time to adapt, build strength and gain stamina, he adds.

And the best way to avoid overuse injuries?

"You definitely don't want to do the same activity or exercise over and over again," he cautions. "That's how you develop overuse injuries and conditions like tendonitis."

Working out or playing sports can be more challenging for older adults who have already undergone joint replacement

surgery, he adds, so be sure to give your body time to adjust to any new workout routine. Pay attention to symptoms that indicate it's time to ease off a bit and give your body time to recover.

Know your body, choose activities wisely

Some of the best low-impact exercise for older adults include:

- Walking
- Swimming and water aerobics
- Biking

Running aficionados, he points out, should keep in mind that serious jogging and running stairs can put more stress on critical hip, knee, ankle and foot joints. Know when to ease off by paying attention to common overuse symptoms, including pain, swelling, stress fractures, shin splints, sprains, pulled muscles, plantar fasciitis, blisters and more.

That applies to pickleball as well, a sport that has grown in both popularity and an increase in groin pulls and hip pain among his patients. It also has been linked to "pickleball elbow," low back pain, and sprained ankles.

For outdoor workouts, especially in Florida, remember to stay hydrated. If the temperatures become uncomfortable or unsafe, find indoor alternatives.

The good news, he says, is that joint replacement surgery "is not what it used to be" for patients who develop bone-on-bone pain or arthritis from overdoing any physical activity or sport.

"Surgery is a lot less invasive," he says. "Patients experience quicker recoveries, and many of them are back to playing their favorite sports in a matter of months, especially if they take things slowly and stick to their rehabilitation plan."

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