

# 5 MYTHS

ABOUT FITNESS & AGING



Linda Yalen  
Certified Health Coach

## Introduction

Metabolically speaking, as we age we slow down and become more sedentary. And because we are not as active as we once were, things begin to happen to our body. We gain weight, have increased pain from degenerative diseases like arthritis, are not as physically stable as we once were and may even have mobility issues. But do you know what? All of these aging issues can be diminished by becoming more fit through exercise and healthy eating.

Let's take each one and look how fitness can help.

- Through eating a healthy diet and exercising, we tend to burn more calories than we eat, so we lose some weight. Check.
- One of the best ways to diminish pain from a degenerative disease is to exercise using a mix of cardio and strength training. Check.
- By exercising, your core becomes more toned, your joints more flexible and hence more stable on your feet. Check.

As far as mobility issues – usually not being able to walk - they might have been caused by years and years of being overweight and to be honest, they won't go away with exercise. However, for people with lower body mobility issues, exercising can reduce the pain and you can still exercise the core and upper body.

## Myth #1 - I'm too old to start exercising now

First, we are *never too old* to start exercising. Even if you walk with the aid of a walker or are wheelchair-bound, there are still exercises you can do to preserve and even improve parts of your body not affected by your lack of mobility.

To make the point, think about this: In America, the Department of Health and Human Services recommends ***each individual*** gets 150 minutes of exercise per week – period. They don't break it down by age groups or current level of fitness or gender; just 150 minutes per week per person. That alone should be an indicator that it is never too old to start exercising.

Need more convincing? A [health website](#) in the U.K (see reference link). recommends adults over the age of 65 with no health issues causing mobility limitations to get at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity and do strength exercises at least 2 days per week that work all of the major muscle groups. A combination of exercising regularly and eating healthy is as close to the fountain of youth as one can get. Not only does it increase the quality of life, but also quantity too.



## Myth #2 – Exercising increases my risk of falling down

Falling down is a valid concern of older adults and for good reason. After all, it is the number one reason how older people break hips or other joints and bones in their body. And many never fully recover their independence back to the point where they once were before the breakage, thus being confined to a wheelchair and living in an assisted living facility or under the care of a family member.

But did you know that being physically active actually **decreases** your risk of falling? It's true. By exercising, you increase your flexibility and range of motion in your joints; your core becomes more toned making you more stable, so you actually *improve* your balance. Just the thought of losing your mobility and independence because of a bone break should be stimulant enough to want to take up exercising to increase your balance and flexibility if you are not doing it already.



## **Myth #3 – Why try, I’ll never get physically fit anyway.**

By eating healthy food in the correct portions (portion control) and doing a mix of cardio exercising and strength training, your fitness level will improve. To lose weight, you must burn bodyfat by consuming 500 fewer calories than you burn up. Doing that over the course of a week results in a loss of one pound of weight.

As you lose weight and get stronger, you will be able to exercise more. Exercising more – especially strength training – tones and builds muscle. And because it takes more calories to support muscle than fat, you’ll burn more calories than before you started exercising.

If you become fitter, not only will you feel younger, but you will look younger too. And working out regularly will reduce your risk of certain health conditions and diseases, such as heart disease, Alzheimer’s, dementia, diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity and certain types of cancers.



## Myth #4 – Mobility issues prevent me from exercising

As we age and if we don't exercise, our joints become stiffer and less flexible. It is a classic case of use it or lose it. The other thing that happens naturally is that we lose muscle mass as we age – around 10% for each 10 years over the age of 40. So, between less muscle mass and not exercising, mobility issues can start to set in over the years. And most people just attribute it to getting older when the real source in many cases is they are exercising less than they did or not at all anymore.

But granted, even exercising won't solve all mobility issues ... especially if those issues were caused from being overweight for a number of years. For every 10 pounds overweight, it puts an additional 30 pounds of stress on your joints – the knees in particular. Once that excessive pressure has worn down the cartilage so it is now bone-on-bone, even exercise can't fix that. If you have bad knees or hips, then focus more on exercises that are lower impact, such as swimming, rowing or using an elliptical machine.

Speaking of swimming, it is a great cardio sport because not only is it easy on the joints (because of the almost weightlessness of the body in water), but it is a full-body workout that uses all of the larger muscle groups in both the upper and lower body. An elliptical trainer and rowing machine are also full-body workouts as they use the arms, shoulders and upper back, in addition to the lower body.



## **Myth #5 – Exercising increases the pain I already have.**

If you have stiff joints and have not been exercising, this is true, it will hurt more ... in the beginning. But once you learn how to exercise properly by warming up before and cooling down after, and you have been doing it awhile, you will notice that you will have less pain than before.

As a matter-of-fact, one of the best treatments recommended for arthritic pain is exercising. Not only will your joints feel better, but you don't experience the undesirable side effects that medication can produce. It is always better to treat the source versus treat the symptoms as is the case with much of modern medicine today.

Here is what the Mayo clinic in the U.S. says about exercising with joint pain:

*“Exercise is crucial for people with arthritis. It increases strength and flexibility, reduces joint pain, and helps combat fatigue. Even moderate exercise can ease your pain and help you maintain a healthy weight. When arthritis threatens to immobilize you, exercise keeps you moving.”*



## Why exercise is vital

Exercise can help you improve your health and fitness without hurting your joints. With your current treatment program, exercise can:

- Strengthen the muscles around your joints
- Help you maintain bone strength
- Give you more energy to get through the day
- Make it easier to get a good night's sleep
- Help you control your weight
- Enhance your quality of life
- Improve your balance

Though you might think exercise will aggravate your joint pain and stiffness, that's not the case. Lack of exercise actually can make your joints even more painful and stiff.

That's because keeping your muscles and surrounding tissue strong is crucial to maintaining support for your bones. Not exercising weakens those supporting muscles, creating more stress on your joints.”





That information is directly from one of the most respected medical and research facilities in the world. If they recommend exercising to reduce joint pain, then you can take it to the bank as something you should be doing.

Of course, before starting any exercise program, be sure to consult with your healthcare professional to see what you should and should not be doing as far as exercising, and to get a recommendation of a healthy eating program. There is an old saying that is so true: "*You can't out exercise a bad diet.*" Eight percent of weight loss comes from diet. Exercising provides the other 20% of weight loss plus it tones and develops muscles.

Living a healthy lifestyle through diet and exercising, along with stopping other damaging behaviors such as smoking and abusing alcohol or drugs – prescription and illicit – will improve your fitness level and reduce (and even in some cases reverse) the effects of aging. Not only will you feel better but will look better too with a tightened body frame and improved outlook on life. It is the perfect recipe to maintain an appropriate fitness level and go through your golden years happy and fit.

## References

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-older-adults/>