

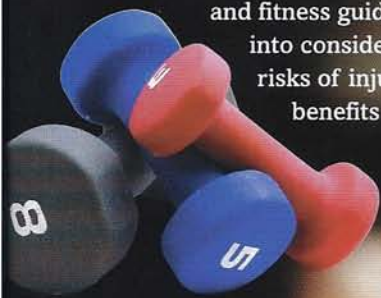
Ageing gracefully

Improve the quality of your life by staying active with age-specific exercises and strength training

By Bernadette Abraham | Gulf News Report

To this day, the ageing process remains a physical wonder among researchers. While there is no way to prevent this natural phenomenon, the combination of regular exercise and proper nutrition have withstood the test of time to help delay, reduce, prevent, and even reverse many of the typical forms of degeneration, such as osteoporosis, osteoarthritis, low back pain and obesity.

Prolonged inactivity will lead to a loss of two to three kilograms of muscle tissue every decade of adult life, which consequently reduces the metabolic rate and the ability to function. This progressive cycle eventually leads to a gradual accumulation of body fat, a lesser amount of physical activity, further muscle loss and physical weakness and a variety of other degenerative problems. But the good news is that regardless of age, regular strength training can markedly delay muscle loss. However, the body does become more susceptible to exercise-related injuries. An over-50 body is much less forgiving than a 20-year-old body since joints, tissues and muscles may not be as flexible as they used to be. Nevertheless, staying active not only promotes a sense of well-being, but also maintains functional and emotional independence. For that reason, the following precautionary measures and fitness guidelines should be taken into consideration to reduce the risks of injuries and reap the many benefits of exercise. ›



Medical clearance

Although it is unlikely that your doctor will tell you not to exercise, it is important to seek medical clearance first, especially if you have a preexisting medical condition or previous injuries that will require modifications to your training programme. Be sure to tell your doctor about any medications or supplements you are taking as these may have effects on your heart rate response. Exercise is often the right prescription for maintaining health, but your doctor can give you specific instructions regarding the type of exercise and intensity that is suitable for you.

Stay limber

Flexibility will be paramount, as older adults lose the elasticity of their connective tissues, which can increase the risk of injuries during

exercise and make daily tasks such as bending down more difficult.

Stretching on a daily basis is highly recommended to help correct muscular imbalances that are caused by poor posture and daily living. Whether it is done first thing in the morning or right before an exercise session, commit to a time everyday and make it as routine as brushing your teeth. Yoga and pilates are other suitable forms of exercise that incorporate flexibility and can add variety to your programme.

It is also worthwhile to consult a qualified personal trainer to assess which muscles are tight. Stretching an already elongated muscle may cause further imbalances. In general, it is wise to stretch the body parts that have been used during exercise. For example, after performing

squats, the quadriceps, hamstrings and gluteals (i.e. muscles of the upper thighs and buttocks) should be stretched. In addition, stretches should be held motionless for at least 20 seconds for maximum effectiveness.

Work on balance

It is known that as adults age many functions decrease, two of which are balance and coordination, which increase the risk of falling. When exercising, it is wise to add an element of controlled instability to help increase neuromuscular efficiency. For example, rather than performing a stable seated exercise, try performing the same exercise while standing on one leg or with your eyes closed to enhance your sense of balance. A stability ball is an affordable piece of equipment that anyone can use at home, the gym, or in the office to increase stability and core strength.

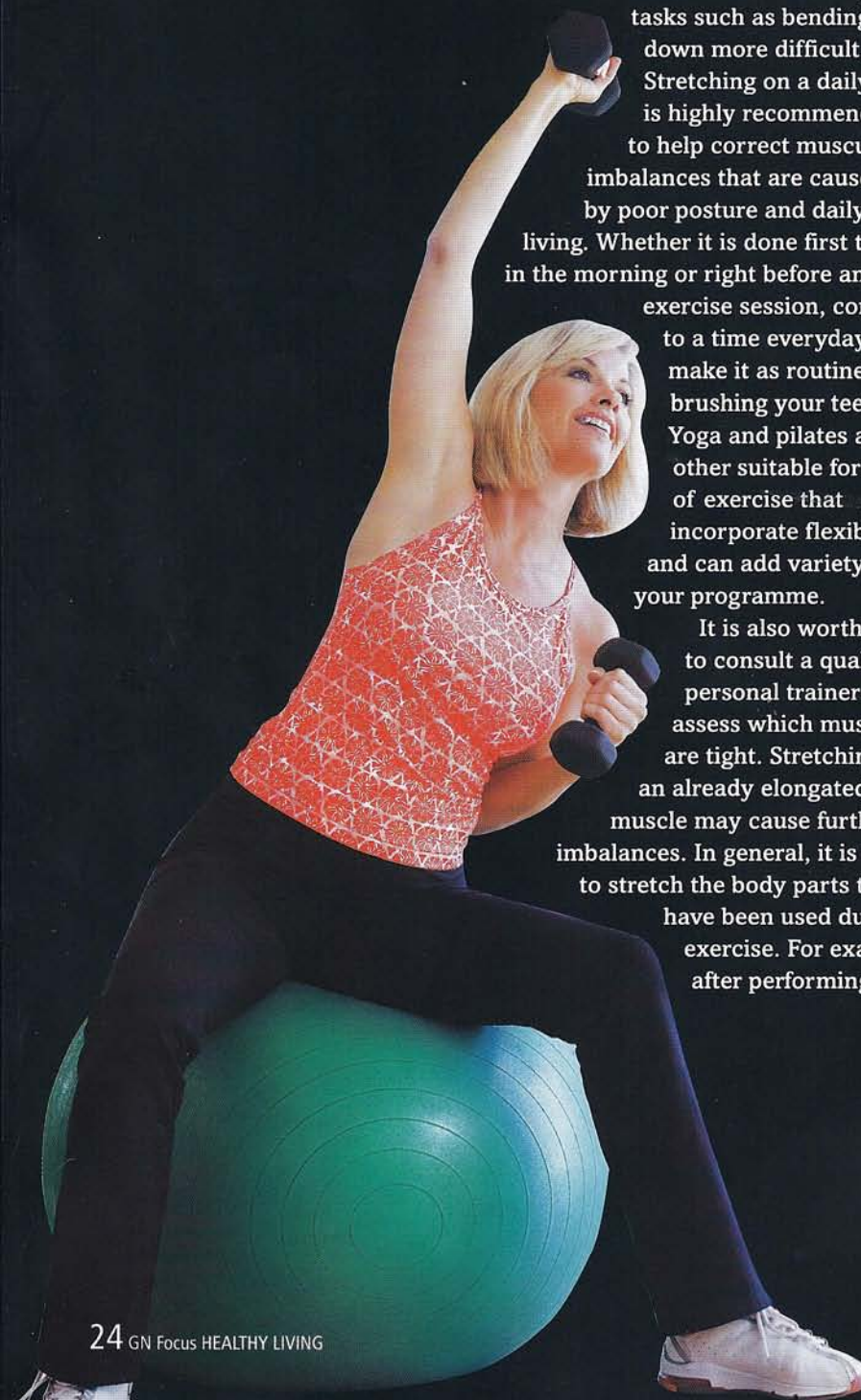
Maintain your muscle

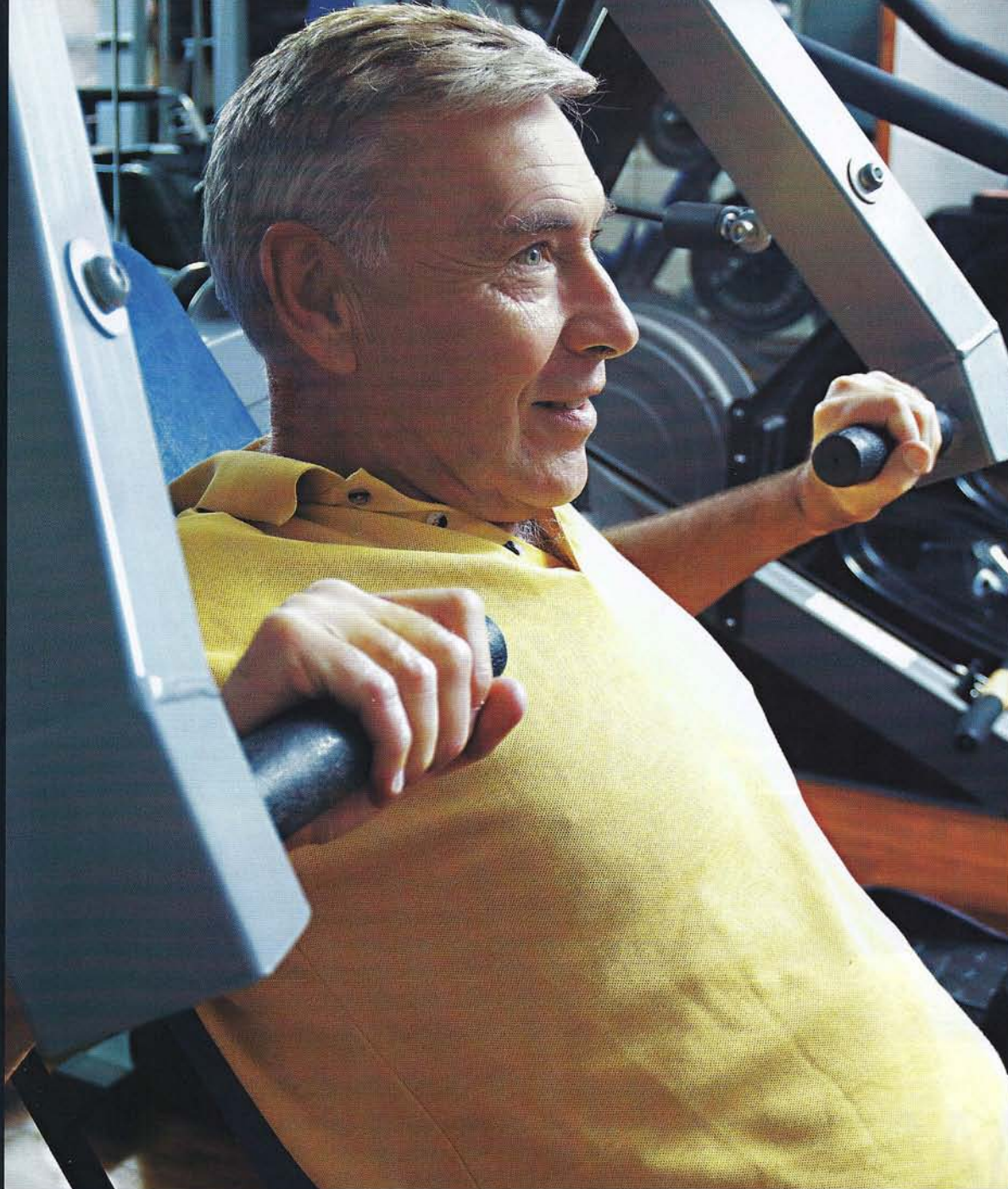
Contrary to popular belief, strength training is extremely beneficial for seniors — even for those who have been previously sedentary. The list of benefits is extraordinary; it increases the metabolic rate, helps reduce body fat, increases bone strength thereby reducing the risk of osteoporosis, improves glucose metabolism, speeds up food transit, lowers resting blood pressure, improves blood lipids, maintains or improves low back health, reduces arthritic pain, improves joint function and helps build overall strength. What is even more remarkable is that these benefits can be experienced in as little as 12 weeks of training.

In general, seated exercise machines are the safest for beginners and can then be progressed to standing exercises using your own bodyweight, light dumb-bells and resistance bands. Resistance training should be performed at least two to three days per week on alternate days for 20 to 30 minutes per session. Select eight to ten exercises that focus on the major muscle groups such as legs, thighs, buttocks, abdominals, back, chest, shoulders, arms and calves. Perform one to three sets of eight to 20 repetitions using light weights. Progressions should be slow, well monitored and based on postural control. Remember to warm-up for five to ten minutes and make sure to stretch before and after your workout to prevent injuries and delay muscle soreness.

Strengthen your heart

The functional capacity of the heart decreases with age, therefore the intensity of the aerobic activity must be altered. In general, any activity that you do should be done with moderate effort, which means you can still talk while you exercise. You should feel invigorated rather than exhausted





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STRENGTH TRAINING: For beginners, seated exercise machines are the safest and then progress to standing exercises using your own bodyweight, light dumb-bells and resistance bands

after your workout. Gradually work your way up to at least 20 minutes of aerobic exercise at least three times per week.

The type of exercise you choose should be enjoyable and pain-free. If you experience soreness in your joints, you may find relief by performing lower impact exercises such as water aerobics, swimming, stationary or recumbent cycling and walking. For indoor training, a treadmill with handrail support may also be useful. As with strength training, a proper five-minute warm-up and cooldown should be done to prepare the body for exercise and allow the body to return to normal conditions afterwards.

Rest and recuperation

Recovery days (R&R) are just as important as exercise. It is important to allow at least one

day of rest in between strength training sessions to allow the body a chance to build and repair muscle tissues. Overtraining can result in overuse and repetitive stress injuries. Always listen to your body and practise common sense.

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