

## Getting Fit Over 40

By Jessica Pennington, PT

Being fit over forty doesn't have to be a struggle. Some minor changes in lifestyle can offer many benefits to a person's health. As one becomes older, exercise does not require as high of an intensity to produce changes in fitness level. Light activity, including housework, gardening and walking can be enough to raise your heart rate and improve your cardiovascular health. Studies have shown it to decrease the risk of diabetes, heart disease and even cancer.

Aerobic exercise with less impact, such as bike riding or swimming, is easier on the joints. Target heart rate is a good method of determining exercise intensity.  $220$  minus your age, multiplied by  $60\%$ , is an equation that determines your target heart rate at a  $60\%$  exertion rate. A brisk walk does not require one to become out of breath or even sweat. At a pace that is fast enough to slightly raise your heart rate you should be able to still carry-on a conversation. Another very important point - a work out partner. It will be easier to maintain an exercise routine with a companion, someone to encourage you and keep you committed to working out. With everyone's busy schedule, exercising or being active for ten minutes at a time, several times a day can also maintain a person's fitness level. You should aim for a combined thirty minutes of activity at least 3 days of the week.

Strength training is another important aspect of fitness. Weight lifting increases muscle mass which can increase metabolism, strengthen joints and improve posture. Toning, or keeping the muscles defined, can be done by lifting moderate to light weights and completing three sets of twelve repetitions. When twelve repetitions become easy, increase the weight. Resistance training can also be completed without weights. Resistance bands are versatile and inexpensive pieces of equipment that don't take up much space. The bands are sold in several different colors or resistances and can be used for all body parts. Exercise or stability balls are also usefully in strengthening, especially of the core or trunk muscles. This can improve balance and tighten those awful abdominal muscles. Resistance training should not be performed on consecutive days in the same muscle groups. Muscles need at least a day to rest, heal and rebuild.

Stretching is often a neglected area of fitness. Stretches should be held gently, without bouncing, for fifteen to thirty seconds. You should feel a stretch or pull in the muscle that is tolerable; but not painful. Pain is a sign that you are stretching too far. Stretching should always be completed after a five minute warm up, never on cold muscles. It is always good to stretch at the end of your workout as well.

The above is intended as general information only. Be sure to contact your physician for advice on your own specific medical problems.