

HEALTHY. HAPPY. FOR REAL. |

Experience Life



Less Is More

Author and Afrominimalist

Christine
Platt

on living simply and intentionally.

p. 16

LIFE TIME

November 2021

Massage & Health

**7 GOOD REASONS
TO PRIORITIZE
HEALING TOUCH**

p. 52

Fit at Every Age

**IT'S NEVER
TOO LATE TO
GET MOVING**

p. 64

+4

Nourishing
Comfort
Meals

p. 46



FIT FOR THE AGES

The physical deterioration long attributed to aging is actually linked to inactivity, according to the latest research.

The good news?
You're never too old to get moving.

BY **MICHAEL DREGNI**



GERRY LOPEZ
Surfer and yoga practitioner



JOAN MACDONALD
Fitness influencer



JOE FRIEL
Coach, author, and bicycle racer





JOAN MACDONALD



When Joan MacDonald turned 70, she stood 5 feet 3 inches tall and weighed 198 pounds. “I was on medication for high blood pressure and acid reflux,” she says. “I had terrible edema in my ankles, my arthritis was extremely painful, and I had difficulty walking up and down stairs. I was tired, I was emotional — and I was in desperate need of a change.”

Joan had seen her own mother’s health decline while she was living in a nursing home. A second wake-up call followed when her daughter Michelle came to her on the verge of tears.

“She said that I had to make a choice — that if I continued on the path I was on I would end up in a hospital even worse off, needing a lot of care, and probably on even more medication,” Joan explains.

Michelle — a strength-and-conditioning specialist, yoga practitioner, chef, and transformation coach — offered to guide her mom through what became a journey. Joan remembers: “She said, ‘You can do this: You can make yourself better. And I’ll be there for you all the way.’”

Michelle advised her mom on nutritious whole-food meals, meditation, and an exercise program, starting slowly and building. “In my first session at the gym,” Joan recalls, “I felt like a fish out of water.”

Within two years — at an age when doctors are often recommending a daily walk for exercise — Joan was doing weighted pull-ups. Now, at 75, the retired driver’s-license examiner from Cobourg, Ontario, is working alongside her daughter as a fitness influencer for other women.

Simply put, she’s one ripped grandma. “Exercise and nutrition saved my life,” Joan says. “You can’t turn back the clock — but you can wind it up again.”



You can’t turn back the clock — **but you can wind it up again.**

One of the greatest, most pervasive fitness misconceptions is that you reach your peak when you’re young. By the time you celebrate 60 candles, the myth goes, you’re too old to exercise and it’s all downhill from there.

The reality is that age is just one factor in a much broader formula determining fitness — and you’re never too old to get moving.

As Joan says, “We are limitless.”

The Rewards of Movement

Getting ripped doesn’t have to be

the goal. Neither does competing in the National Senior Games (but then again, why not?).

Instead, it could simply be about playing on the floor with your grandchildren, gardening backache-free, going for a walk without joint pain, or getting out of bed each morning without accompanying groans. The rewards of movement come every day, in physical and mental health, quality of life, and, yes, outlook on life.

“I still have arthritis and I get some aches and pains,” explains Joan, “but I have found by eating well and exercising that the aches and pains are not what they used to be. My mobility and flexibility have improved as well.

“Do what you can in regard to your health: You want to be in a place where you can actually live your life versus just enduring it.”

Movement is key to ensuring — and enhancing — quality of life as we age, says Ramesh Sairam, MD, geriatric psychiatrist at United Hospital in St. Paul, Minn., and a teacher at Common Ground Meditation Center in Minneapolis. Activity aids cognitive preservation, he explains, as do social and intellectual stimuli, such as solving puzzles or joining a book club.

“Retirement is not like it was 30 years ago,” Sairam says, explaining that longer life expectancies — averaging 15 years beyond retirement age — emphasize the need to

consider your future. “Retirement has to have a reasonable amount of structure so that you don’t go from an ordered work routine to one devoid of any. A daily routine of one physical, one intellectual, one social, and one spiritual, religious, or contemplative activity is a good guide.”

In fact, the benefits of moving are so obvious that doctors are now prescribing exercise as medicine.

“You can expect an improvement in almost every facet of your life,” says physiologist and researcher Anoop T. Balachandran, PhD, assistant professor at the City University of New York’s Queens College. “Exercising reduces the risk of chronic diseases, diabetes, heart disease, and eight of the most common types of cancer, such as breast, colon, and lung. Other benefits include lowering the risk of dementia and Alzheimer’s, and improving cognition.”

He also notes that for many ailments, exercise may be as effective as prescribed treatments or approved drugs — or even more so. Movement helps ward off osteoporosis; it’s a relief for anxiety and depression; and it’s a common therapy in Parkinson’s disease.

Exercise actually improves your health at any age, from your head to your toes, keeping bones, muscles, and joints functioning, as well as supporting your immune system and microbiome. (For more on the many benefits of activity, see ELmag.com/madetomove.)

“I can keep going — and there could be hundreds of benefits that we researchers haven’t discovered yet,” Balachandran says. “Exercise is just as important as brushing your teeth every day.”

Research psychologist and Stanford University lecturer Kelly McGonigal, PhD, highlights its spiritual effects. Recent analysis pinpoints the release of a muscle-derived protein called irisin that appears to inspire hope.

In studies of mice deprived of irisin, the rodents “appeared to ‘lose hope,’ as

THE FACTS OF AGING

“The aging process is real,” says David C. Nieman, DrPH, FACSM. “And several changes in the body are linked to age-related decline.”

In our “middle years,” we go through hormonal changes. Many people are anticipating retirement, and experiencing aches and pains from the physical wear and tear that comes with several decades on the planet. Well-meaning loved ones and total strangers may advise you to slow down and take it easy. But our experts advise the opposite: Get active.

“To many, getting older means a gradual ease into a more sedentary way of life, simply because you cannot do what you were once able to. But that couldn’t be further from the truth, because our idea of aging is completely wrong,” says Colin Milner of the International Council on Active Aging.

Coach Joe Friel outlines what he terms the Facts of Aging.

Fact 1.

STRENGTH DECREASES.

Sarcopenia, or loss of muscle, typically starts around age 40. The result is a decrease in overall strength. At the same time, we lose bone density, metabolism slows, and our joint range diminishes.

Fact 2.

BODY COMPOSITION CHANGES.

As we age, “we all experience a significant change in body composition,” Friel says. By their late 60s, most men lose about 26 pounds of lean mass — mostly muscle. Women lose about 11 pounds. Combined with hormonal changes and slowing metabolism, the result is typically higher body-fat levels.

Fact 3.

AEROBIC CAPACITY DECREASES.

Over the years, your maximal heart rate reduces and the volume of blood pumped with each heartbeat decreases, Friel notes. The result is that you simply aren’t capable of delivering as much oxygen to your working muscles as when you were younger.

“Here’s the good news,” Friel says. “With consistent exercise and healthy lifestyle habits, we can minimize or reverse these symptoms of aging and remain fit and active well into our 50s, 60s, 70s, and beyond.”

“The goal is to push back frailty to a very small part of the life experience,” Nieman summarizes. “Or as anthropologist Ashley Montagu suggested, ‘The goal of life is to die young — as late as possible!’”



evidenced by their decreased survival efforts,” according to a 2016 multi-study review in Oxford University’s *Physical Therapy Journal*.

“During physical activity, muscles secrete [irisin] into your bloodstream that makes your brain more resilient to stress,” McGonigal writes in *The Joy of Movement*. “Scientists call them ‘hope molecules.’”

Getting Going

You hear it often — and perhaps you’ve said it yourself: “I ache all over — I guess I’m just getting old.” But new research is finding that that age-old excuse simply isn’t true.

“Much of the deterioration attributed to aging is instead now linked to physical inactivity,” explains pioneering exercise researcher David C. Nieman, DrPH, FACSM, director of the Human Performance Laboratory at North Carolina’s Appalachian State University.

In fact, getting moving is so important to our health and well-being that in 2010 the World Health Organization issued recommendations that all

adults, regardless of age, get at least 150 minutes of “moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity” per week. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention breaks down the recommendation into bite-sized bits: 30 minutes a day, five days a week — or even smaller chunks throughout your days.

“Movement is medicine, and exercise is life. Keep paddling!” sums up legendary waterman Gerry Lopez, 72, whose days revolve around the activities he loves. He has

surfing for more than 60 years and practiced yoga for more than 50 — and he’s not stopping now.

“One is never ‘too old’ to exercise. Age has nothing to do with it,” says elite triathlon and cycling coach Joe Friel, author of more than a dozen books, including *Fast After 50* and the *Training Bible* series.

“In fact,” he explains, “the older one gets, the more important exercise is.”

MICHAEL DREGNI is an *Experience Life* deputy editor.

“
Movement is medicine,
and exercise is life.”

THE MENTAL HURDLE

Some people are active or play sports well into middle age, so continuing past age 60 is simply staying the course. But for others, inspiration to get moving is the first hurdle. Our experts offer the following ideas.

CONSIDER THE WHY BEFORE THE HOW.

Be mindful of your reasons for moving, advises geriatric psychiatrist Ramesh Sairam, MD. “Reflect on what your goals are for this stage of your life: It’s good to say, ‘I’m doing this for a positive reason,’ as opposed to, ‘I’m doing this to stave off something.’”

Mentally, being active every day to fend off muscle loss is much harder than working out to maintain strength and improve mobility. “A positive motivation will

keep pulling you in the right direction — it has to have meaning and purpose.”

THINK BEYOND TRADITIONAL EXERCISE.

There are many ways to be active. “Exercise doesn’t have to be structured. It could be in the form of gardening, hiking, dancing, playing sports, or other everyday chores you do,” says physiologist Anoop T. Balachandran, PhD. (For more on the many activity options, see ELmag.com/fitnessroutine.)

START SLOW. “Always move up gradually in intensity and duration: This will prevent injuries — and you may enjoy the activity more this way,” advises Balachandran.

FIND AN EXERCISE PARTNER.

“The best motivator I’ve seen is a training partner,” says coach Joe Friel. “Agreeing to meet someone for a workout or exercise session on a regular schedule is very effective.”

HAVE FUN! “Enjoy whatever you do,” says Balachandran.

“If you don’t, find an activity that you *do* enjoy. What we clearly know is that most people start exercising but stop within a few months because they don’t enjoy what they’re doing.”

THINK LONG TERM.

“Make health a gift to yourself,” advises Joan MacDonald. Look up great workouts and recipes, nurture your mindset, and give yourself some accountability. “Over time, if you keep it up you will see a change. Seeing the change will inspire you to keep going.”

FIT-FOR-LIFE TRAINING

The keys to maintaining — and improving — your fitness are the same at any age: It's all about how hard, how long, and how consistently you exercise. Your ability to handle the stress of exercise is what changes.

"The first thing aging fit people usually notice is that we don't

recover as quickly from our workouts," explains coach Joe Friel. "We might also be feeling a loss of power. Hills seem steeper and we will probably see certain performance markers declining."

So, start slow and build — and be kind to yourself, with ample rest and recovery.

Stretching

Stiffer joints are an almost universal complaint as we age. Movement of any kind floods joints with oxygenated blood and helps build mobility and flexibility. As you get older, stretching becomes more important than ever — and *feels* better than ever.

Gently stretch before and after exercise, plus as often as you like during the day. You might also try a yoga class, water exercises, or other movement classes such as SilverSneakers.

- For an effective warm-up routine, see ELmag.com/perfectwarmup.

Balance Exercises

A declining sense of balance is a common and early factor of aging, often beginning at age 40 or 50; falls are the No. 1 cause of accidents for people over 65. This can be due to inner-ear issues, vision issues, lower blood pressure, and slowing reflexes as well as declines in muscle and joint strength.

"A lot of older adults ignore or are unaware of the importance of balance exercises in their routine. When you get older, they are as important as strength and aerobic training," says physiologist Anoop T. Balachandran, PhD. "Drugs could lower the risk of breaking bones from falls, but exercise will prevent you from falling in the first place."

He recommends simple exercises such as standing on one leg, and straight-in-line, heel-to-toe walks. If these seem easy, try doing them with your eyes closed.

All strength-building exercises — especially core-strength work — will aid your balance.

- For balance exercises, see ELmag.com/balanceexercises.

Strength Training

Many people concentrate on cardio exercise as they age, but Friel explains that age-related declines in fitness are primarily due to loss of muscle mass. "If you want to be highly fit, focus first and foremost on your muscles. Your heart will follow suit."

Regular resistance training can help you retain — and regain — muscle mass at any age, Friel says. "Forget the myth that you can't build muscles in your 60s and 70s. Though it may not happen quite as quickly as in previous decades, you definitely can. Sedentary people of all ages, including those in their 80s, have successfully improved muscle strength with weightlifting."

- For an all-ages strength-training workout, try ELmag.com/allagesworkout.
- To determine how much weight is right for you, see ELmag.com/pickingweights.
- For more on strength training's benefits, go to ELmag.com/beststrong.
- For information on healthy joints, see ELmag.com/feedyourjoints.

Cardio Training

The heart, too, is a hard-working muscle, and you need to challenge your cardiovascular system and aerobic capacity to keep it strong.

Earlier studies suggested that older people were not as responsive to aerobic training as their younger counterparts, but recent research has reversed this theory, according to exercise researcher David C. Nieman, DrPH. "There is now a growing consensus that gains in aerobic fitness are similar, albeit at a lower level for the elderly. In general, the same basic exercise programs used for young adults can be applied to the elderly, but with an emphasis upon greater caution and slower progression."

Nieman explains that maximal aerobic fitness, or VO_2 max, normally declines 8 to 10 percent per decade after 25 years of age. "At any given age, however, people can have a much higher VO_2 max if they exercise vigorously and keep lean. Studies of masters

athletes show that those who are 65 to 75 years of age can have the VO_2 max levels of young sedentary adults."

Cardio training can be as simple as a spirited walk or gardening session to get your heart working harder than normal. Or you can step it up with interval training — brief bursts of high-intensity exercise alternating with low-intensity periods. High-intensity interval training (HIIT) strengthens the aerobic system by increasing the heart's pumping capacity and the blood vessels' elasticity. HIIT can be high- or low-impact; pushing effort and your rate of perceived exertion are key.

If you're going to do intervals, start easy; too much too soon can result in injury.

- For a low-impact interval workout, see ELmag.com/lowimpacthiit.
- For a high-impact interval-training workout, see ELmag.com/readysethiit.

Rest and Recovery

When you stress your body with exercise, you are forcing muscle and other tissues to break down; your body then needs time to "supercompensate" and recover, rebuilding and getting stronger in the process. You can tell you need this rest and recovery when you're fatigued, have sore muscles, are lacking motivation to exercise again, feel irritable, or, counterintuitively, are sleeping poorly. Nutritious meals and sleep are ideal recovery tools.

- For a recovery-enhancing workout, see ELmag.com/recoverypro.
- For ideas on efficient recovery, see ELmag.com/recoverydays.
- For more on the importance of recovery, see ELmag.com/recoveryzone.