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## It's Never too Late to Get Active

By Megan Rauscher

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - For life-long couch potatoes in their 60s, 70s and beyond, the prospect of starting an exercise program can be daunting -- but it doesn't have to be, a researcher told the American College of Sports Medicine's 12th annual Health and Fitness Summit in Long Beach, California.

In an interview with Reuters Health, Melissa Miller, who spoke at the meeting, noted that 4 out of 10 older adults suffer from a chronic condition, like heart disease, high cholesterol, or arthritis. "A lot of these older adults avoid exercise because they think they are going to hurt themselves or make their condition worse, when, in fact, almost all conditions can be helped by exercise," Miller said.

Almost anyone can do some form of exercise and reap the benefits, which in the immediate-term include relaxation, stress and anxiety reduction, and enhanced mood. Long-term benefits of exercise, in addition to weight loss, are increased strength and balance, and improvement in chronic ailments, including improved mental health, a sense of belonging, increased life span and overall quality of life.

"There is really only 1 or 2 percent of the population that cannot exercise in some capacity to improve well being," Miller said. "Most just need guidance on what type of exercise is best for them."

Miller, a PhD candidate at Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota, suggests that older adults talk to their doctor first and work with a qualified trainer, at least initially. Having someone to exercise with is also a good idea.

"For older adults, once they start exercising and understand the benefits of exercise, they are more likely to stick with it than any other age demographic. It's just getting them started," Miller noted.

Because a person's confidence that he or she can do a specific task decreases with age, Miller suggests building on what they've done in the past. For example, a former dancer could practice leg lifts; a former basketball player could start by shooting some hoops; a former runner could take up walking.

"Doing what you've done in the past at a younger age is a great way to build confidence and motivation," said Miller. "Realizing that "my body can do still do this, I can be active, is a big motivating factor for many."

It's critically important, Miller added, for older adults to know that it is never too late to improve their health and fitness level.



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