What can we gain from daily exercise?

Researchers have studied the effects of exercise on longevity, but the exact number of years gained from exercise varies among studies. Overall, results confirm that regularly engaging in at least a moderate level of physical activity can help you age well and feel better in later years. Some of the benefits include:

- Lower risk of death and disability from heart disease.
- Lower risk of high blood pressure and cholesterol.
- Lower risk of premature death.
- Lower risk of type 2 diabetes.
- Lower risk of colon and breast cancers.
- Healthy weight.
- Healthy muscles, bones and joints.
- Better sleep and digestion.
- Better mental skills.
- Better balance and less risk of falling.
- Better sports performance and more energy.

**Best advice:** Incorporate a variety of activities into each day that produces balanced fitness — aerobic activity for cardiovascular health, strength exercises for stamina, and stretching for flexible joints.

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**FANTASTIC FALL FRUITS**

Fall is the time when many colorful fruits come into season. Here are just a few varieties:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Tips</th>
<th>Try</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apples</td>
<td>Lots of varieties – Jonagold, Fuji, Gala, Braeburn and Pink Lady, to name a few</td>
<td>Eating plain for dessert or for a sweet snack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grapes (Red, purple or green)</td>
<td>The perfect portable snack</td>
<td>Taking a bunch to work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blueberries</td>
<td>Stock up and freeze for later use</td>
<td>Adding to your morning oatmeal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pears</td>
<td>Contain 5 grams of fiber per serving</td>
<td>Topping a bed of baby spinach with grilled pears, pecans and feta cheese</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*More information and ideas: [www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov](http://www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov)*

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**Wise Health Care Consumer**

Health care seems more complicated than ever these days.

How do smart consumers navigate the system?

- **Keep your own medical records.** Make a list of your medications, providers (with phone and fax numbers) and allergies. If you can scan and save reports or test results online, you can then access them remotely while traveling. Yes, there’s an app for that.
- **Prevent problems.** Schedule regular checkups, and stay current with immunizations and screenings.
- **Choose providers carefully.** Obtain referrals from trusted friends or professionals, and check for board certification and experience. Get a second opinion when in doubt.
- **Arrive at appointments prepared.** Come early to fill out paperwork, and have your own notepad and questions ready in advance.
- **Be wise with drugs.** Read the labels, take as directed, and be familiar with side effects and possible drug interactions. Buy generics or purchase by mail when available to save money. Keep first-aid, anti-itch, pain and cold remedies on hand. Discard expired meds.
- **Save the ER for true emergencies.** Call your provider (or self-treat) for low-grade fevers, minor cuts, rashes and mild sunburns. **Call 911** or go to the ER for loss of consciousness, uncontrollable bleeding, signs of a stroke or heart attack, an allergic reaction with breathing difficulty, poisoning, or loss of consciousness.

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**“Always do your best. What you plant now, you will harvest later.”**

– Og Mandino
Prostate Health: Knowledge Is Power

The prostate is a walnut-sized gland in men that surrounds the urethra, the tube that carries urine from the bladder. It causes problems for many men. See your health care provider if you notice any of the following symptoms:

- Urination stream is slow.
- You often wake during the night to urinate.
- You notice blood in your urine.
- Your bladder doesn’t feel completely empty after urination.

Some of these are signs of prostate enlargement, a non-life-threatening condition. But they could also be signs of prostate cancer, so don’t delay having them checked by a medical professional.

Screening for prostate cancer is controversial — earlier this year the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommended against screening for healthy men with no family history of prostate cancer. However, the American Cancer Society disagrees and recommends talking with your health care provider starting at:

- Age 50, if you’re at average risk for prostate cancer (and are expected to live at least 10 more years).
- Age 45, if you’re at high risk for prostate cancer. Factors that increase risk include African-American heritage or having a father, brother or son (first-degree relative) diagnosed with prostate cancer before age 65.
- Age 40, if you’re at highest risk. This applies to men who have more than one first-degree relative who had prostate cancer before age 65.

Prostate Cancer Awareness Month
If you’re a guy and one of the guidelines listed above applies to you, talk to your provider.

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD, FAAFP

Q: Best habits for improving cholesterol?
A: Many people can improve blood cholesterol levels — and ultimately heart health — by lowering total cholesterol and LDL levels and raising HDL with some practical steps.

1. Lose excess weight, especially around your waistline.
2. Add daily aerobic walking to raise cardiovascular fitness.
3. Cut saturated fat by limiting meats and full-fat dairy foods.
4. Avoid transfats, which are often used in processed foods that list partially hydrogenated fats.
5. Add soluble fiber (found in oats, dried beans, squash and apples) daily.
6. Eat at least two servings of fatty fish each week for omega-3 fatty acids.
7. If you smoke, quit. Kicking tobacco can improve heart factors and health in general.

* Get a fasting lipoprotein profile every five years starting at age 20.

— Elizabeth Smoots, MD, FAAFP

September is Cholesterol Education Month.

Ladies, Mark Your Calendars
September 26 is National Women’s Health & Fitness Day.

More than 1,000 groups nationwide will host women’s health and fitness events. An estimated 80,000 to 100,000 women are expected to participate in noncompetitive activities in their communities. Activities will include exercise demonstrations, health information workshops, health screenings and walking events. Learn more at www.fitnessday.com/women/index.htm.

Watch Your Head
We’re all vulnerable to the effects of head injuries, regardless of age, so it’s wise to wear helmets when biking, riding ATVs, skiing or skating. What about returning to sports after a concussion? To answer this question, computerized neurological evaluations measure your ability to concentrate, memorize and think, establishing a baseline at the beginning of the season. If you are injured, retesting can tell you if there’s been a change and whether you can return to play. Protect your brain now for the long run. — Zorba Paster, MD

NEXT MONTH: Fitness Trends

Smart moves for your personal wellness program are at www.personalbest.com/extras/sept12tools.