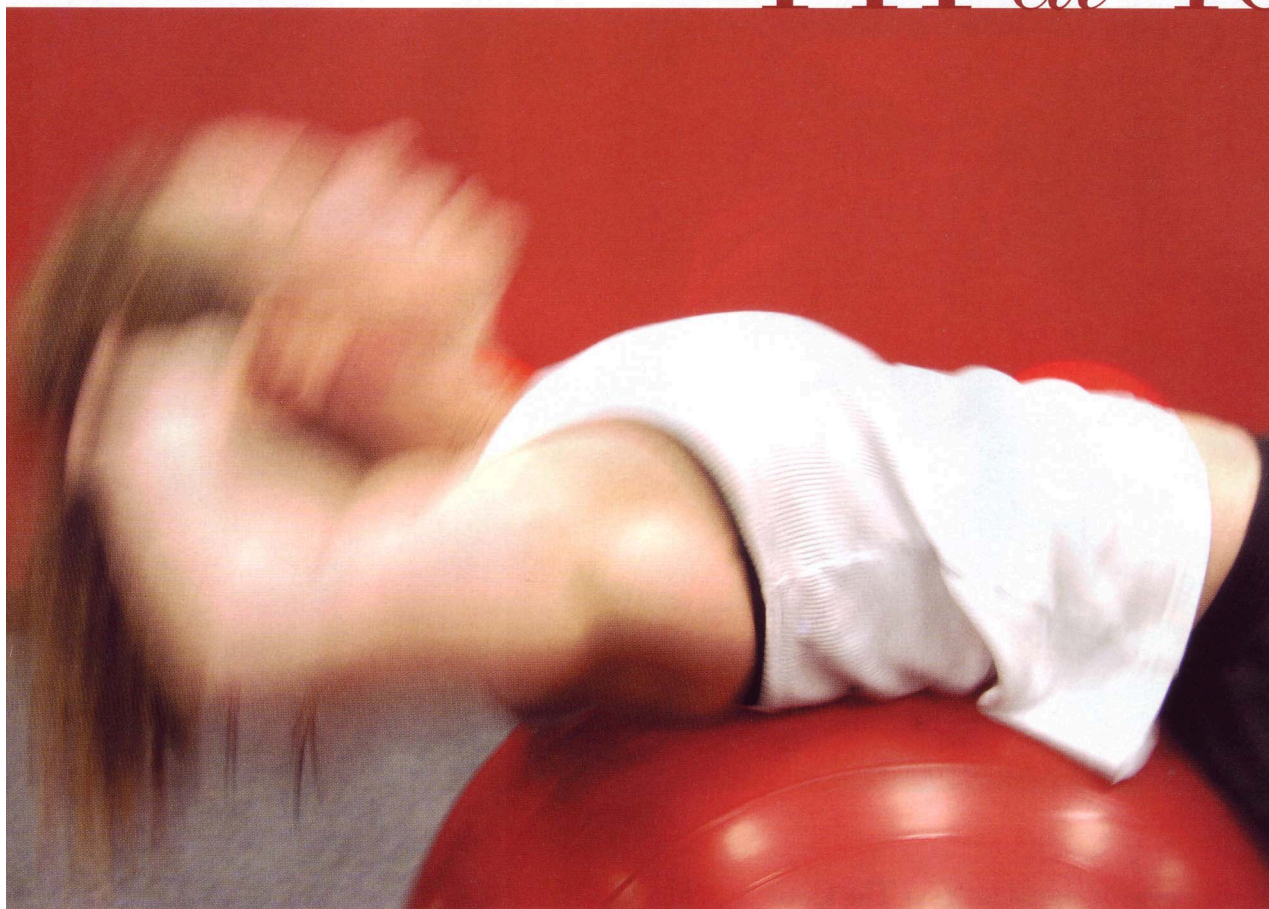


Fitness fun doesn't end at 40. With tailored programs and a little motivation, even the most sluggish boomer can discover the energy and physique of youth.

## FIT *at* 40



IN SOME PARTS OF THE WORLD, the average life expectancy of the adult population is only around 40 years. In the United States, on the other hand, many people would argue that life really doesn't begin until 40.

Simply put, the big "Four-O" now isn't what it was just 30 years ago. Reaching that milestone doesn't necessarily mean that things have to start slowing down. Athletes like Michael Jordan and Jerry Rice continue to compete with others almost half their age on a world-class basis. George Foreman even won a heavy-weight boxing title at the age of 40.

Statistically, people 40 and over are joining health clubs and becoming involved in physical fitness programs at a higher rate than ever before. And, those who have made exercise and fitness a large part of their lives throughout their 20s and 30s are able to continue pushing their bodies, participating in any number of activities — marathons, triathlons, mountain climbing, and more. However, for those looking down the barrel at 40 who don't know how to tell the difference between a barbell and a dumbbell, rest assured, it's not

too late to start. The following advice from some of Birmingham's top fitness and wellness experts just may help you get fit at 40.

### **PUMP IT UP**

According to Carol Kutik, an exercise physiologist and the head of exercise programming for SportsFirst, the best activity a person 40 and older can do is strength training. However, lifting weights — or "pumping iron" as the phrase goes — seems to be the activity of last resort for many people, particularly those who want to lose weight and find themselves running themselves silly on the treadmill. Kutik says that weight training is beneficial to all people, regardless of age.

"Strength training is of the utmost importance, because we lose so much muscle mass as we age," Kutik says. "Cardiovascular exercise alone isn't going to help you get back the muscle mass." This is particularly true for women, who face a host of challenges as they age, including osteoporosis. Women who strength-train regularly can dramatically improve their flexibility and mobility and overcome loss of bone strength due to the effects of osteo-

porosis. However, many women exercise for years every day, running mile after mile on treadmills, climbing hill after hill on stair steppers, and biking hour after hour on exercise bikes with little noticeable change in their bodies. This all too familiar problem is mainly due to the lack of understanding women have about weight training, Kutik says.

"Many women are afraid they're going to get huge and bulky or just don't understand how important weight training is for them," Kutik said. "People, especially women, don't need to be afraid of strength training."

#### **STRETCH YOUR HORIZONS**

Other fitness options include yoga as well as Pilates, a form of group exercise that promotes flexibility and strength in a calming and peaceful atmosphere. Pilates classes are usually taught in a dark room with no music, allowing participants to build strength and gain flexibility in a calming, stress-free environment, a perfect exercise solution for a sometimes hectic and frazzled lifestyle.

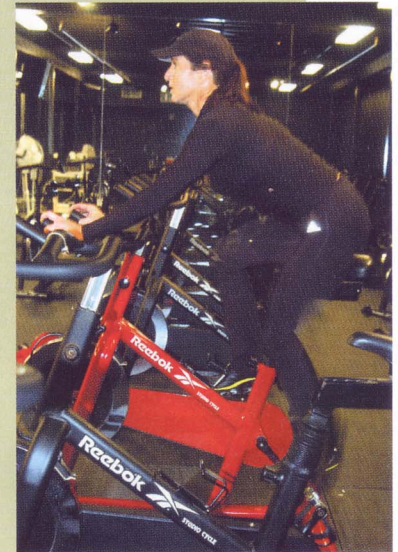
While strength training should be an area of focus for people 40 and older, cardiovascular exercise can prove to be a bit tricky at this age. Knee joints, hip joints, and ankles all take a pounding from the impact from jogging and biking. This type of physical impact can result in such conditions as shin splints, tendonitis, bone spurs and arthritis, all of which can be an obstacle to the enjoyment of any of these heart-healthy activities.

#### **WATER BABIES**

Just because you may not be able to jog down Highland Avenue as much as you are used to, it doesn't mean that you can't find ways to get your heart rate up on a regular basis. Instead of strapping on your track shoes, why not a swim cap and a pair of goggles?

Swimming may just be the perfect workout for anyone in the 40-plus age bracket, especially for those with joint problems, according to Sherry Colgin, a swim instructor and triathlon coach for Team-In-Training, an endurance and sports training program that raises money for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. Colgin trains active adults to be more efficient and comfortable in the water, many of whom have set a goal of competing in a triathlon. While many of her students are hesitant at first, most find swimming to be an activity they can enjoy for years to come because of its low-impact nature.

"You can do it forever because it is such an easy medium to be in. It's easy on the joints and it's soothing," Colgin said.



### **Laurie Earley**

Inverness Country Club golf instructor Laurie Earley is what some people would call a fitness nut. In the weight room anywhere from four to six days per week, Earley is the type of person whose day isn't complete without some form of physical exercise—a major part of her life for two decades. The San Diego native has always been an avid runner and aerobics enthusiast. However, it was only recently that the 41-year-old started lifting weights on a regular basis.

"I've probably been working out since I was 20," Earley admits. "Most of the time I did cardio and high-impact aerobics. Now I do a lot of spinning, and weight training has become very important to me, too."

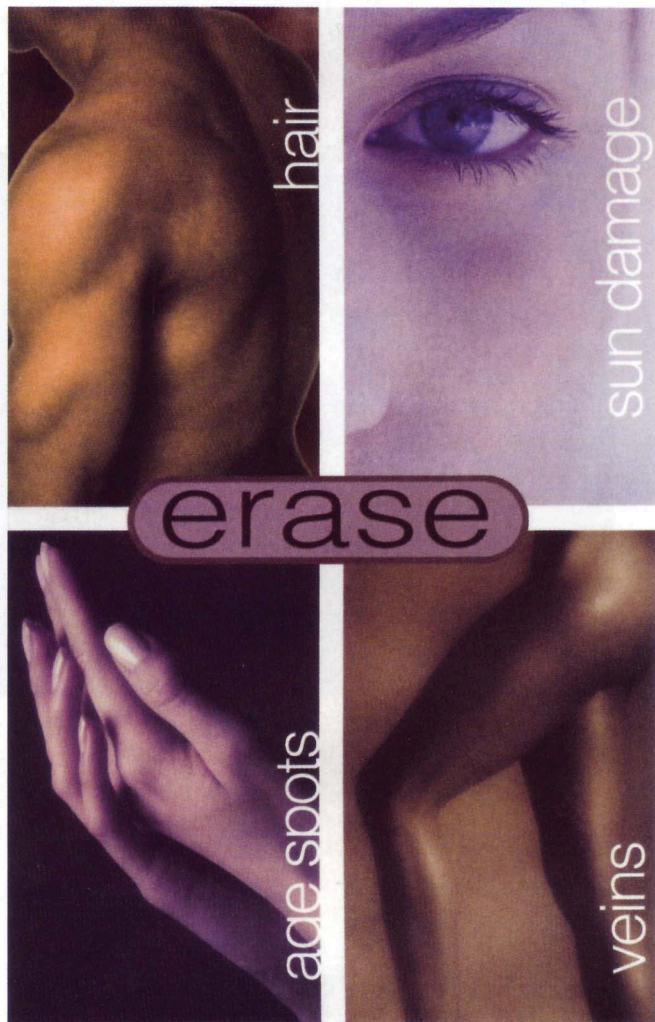
Earley's decision to begin "pumping iron" resonates with women nationwide who spend countless hours on the treadmill attempting to lose weight without success. For Earley, weights have been the missing link to achieving her goals. She still runs and cycles on a regular basis, but no longer counts on cardiovascular exercise alone to help her stay physically fit.

"Cardiovascular exercise is important to me because it makes me feel good," Earley said, "but the weights are what have made the difference and changed my whole body."

Now, training for the Rock and Roll marathon in her native San Diego, Earley has set new goals for herself. Chief among those goals is to not only finish her first marathon, but to cross the finish line in full stride, without having to walk a single step along the course.

"I'm very goal oriented and it is my goal to finish the marathon," Earley said. "I'd really like to be able to run the whole thing."

"I want to be able to know what my potential is," Earley added, "and I want to reach my potential, whatever it is."



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Through swimming, an active adult can build strength with the increased resistance the water provides, as well as raise the heart rate, which burns calories and aids in weight loss, a characteristic that wasn't always thought to be possible with this activity.

"It's always been thought that you can't lose weight by swimming," Colgin said. "But, when you swim you're moving muscles and burning calories. With swimming you can burn calories and lose weight."

Even if you're not a comfortable swimmer, there are plenty of activities you can participate in to take advantage of the low-impact medium the pool provides. Water aerobics is probably the most popular alternative, combining the high energy and music of an aerobics class on land with the added resistance of the water. Also, running in the water and balancing exercises are great activities that can be done even if you never learned to swim.

### SET GOALS

Regardless of your body type, skills, weaknesses, and goals, the best thing you can do for yourself is find an activity you like and set goals and do it, Kutik says, because that's what the human body was meant to do.

"You have to focus on the "can" and not on the "can't," Kutik says. "The human body was created to be active and move." ●

### Injury Prevention

Just as it is important for everyone, regardless of age, to get adequate amounts of exercise, it is equally important for each individual to understand what his or her body is capable of. This will help to prevent injuries. So common are injuries such as tendonitis, tennis elbow, ankle sprains, and certain knee injuries among the older 40 demographic that a term has been coined to describe the phenomenon: Boomeritis.

Dave Bledsoe, a physical therapist with Bledsoe, Pate Rehabilitation, Inc. in Vestavia, says for people 40 and older, it is important to understand they're not 18 anymore and aren't going to be able to do the same activities at the same levels they once did. He says that it is crucial for each person to understand what his/her limitations are and to plan their physical fitness around those limitations.

Bledsoe adds that genetics plays a big role in what kind of activities for which your body is designed. For instance, people with thinner frames and greater flexibility may make better runners, while people with good endurance and strong upper bodies may make for better tennis players. Regardless of the activity, however, preparing for the workout is most important.

"Warming up will help you prevent an injury from occurring, because the body isn't immediately ready any more," Bledsoe says. "Getting adequate rest, eating well and getting enough water are also very important."

If you simply must exercise every day, Bledsoe says you can incorporate "active rest" into your regimen.

"Active rest means doing an activity that doesn't aggravate the same body part," Bledsoe explains. "Including as many different activities as you can will help you develop a more balanced physique."