

Five Best Ways to Keep Fit and Healthy Beyond Fifty

By Deborah Butler

Staying healthy can be a struggle at any age. We tend to have more responsibilities nowadays, less time to exercise with our overburdened schedules, and so many opportunities to sabotage healthy habits. As we get older, it may seem even more difficult to stay healthy and fit. The good news is that we can keep ourselves looking and feeling fabulous even as we move toward, and, yes, beyond middle age.

There are so many benefits to growing more mature. We can harvest all of the experience and wisdom that we've developed throughout our years, becoming role models and sages for others in our lives. For many, since we may have worked and saved for this time, we can feel more financially secure. We can also feel vigorous, vibrant, and vital by taking care of ourselves at this exciting time in our lives. There are some simple but effective ways to accomplish this.

Exercise. You knew this one was first. Now, exercise may look different for us at different stages of our lives. Maybe the kickboxing classes we used to take feel different now. Not so comfortable. That doesn't mean that a new activity is somehow less powerful or that it won't benefit us just as much.

There are classes of all types for all types of people if we enjoy working out with others. There are personal trainers for those of us who need a little push and someone to move us in the right direction. Then there's the ultimate no-equipment-needed activity. Walking. As long as we keep our heart rates up and make sure we stretch to warm up and cool down, we're giving ourselves a gift. As with any new exercise, it's important to talk to a healthcare provider first. It's also essential to listen to our bodies and honor any signs of true discomfort.

Muscle Strength Our muscles can lose size and strength as we mature, but a lot of this atrophy can be mitigated with routine use. Muscle loss can cause that jiggly appearance in places we don't want it, but it can also lead to fatigue and [weakness](#). The great thing about increasing our muscle strength is that it doesn't require bench-pressing three hundred pounds. There are many muscle-strengthening exercises that are more accessible to everyone. Using light free weights with more repetitions works.

Yoga has many [asanas](#)—like boat pose and tree pose—that build muscles even more effectively than weight lifting. Walking is also a weight-bearing exercise. In addition to

creating a more toned and fit physique, weight strengthening activities help us prevent bone loss and help to protect our joints.

Flexibility As we age, our flexibility sometimes diminishes. Yet, it's important to remain flexible to help prevent that stiff feeling in our hips, backs, and knees. Staying [flexible](#) also decreases the risk of injuries. Once again, yoga is an amazing and mindful way to stay flexible. Simple [stretches](#), like static stretches in which you hold a stretch for about thirty seconds and then relax—doing about three to five repetitions— daily can loosen up those joints. Again, pay attention to what your body tells you so you don't strain a muscle. [Tai chi](#) is a wonderful way to increase flexibility as well. There are YouTube videos, classes, and books to help get you started.

Balance is so important for living actively and safely. Though our [balance](#) can erode as our vision and vestibular system change, we can certainly fight off the deterioration. Again, yoga makes its mark. Yoga practice creates an awareness of where we are in space (proprioception) as well as stability throughout our bodies. Tai Chi is also great for developing better balance. Simple activities, like standing on one foot at a time or walking toe-to-heel across a room, can help us maintain better balance.

Mindfulness No matter what age we are, creating a [mindful practice](#) can help us to live presently and enjoyably. Our mental health is just as important than our physical health. Mindfulness allows us to focus on what's in front of us, whether it's washing the dishes or listening to a partner. It cultivates our empathy and compassion for others—and for ourselves. When we practice mindfulness and learn to focus on one thing at a time, we find that our memories are improved. [Neural flexibility](#) is increased. Our total sense of well being is enhanced.

There's no way of escaping the process of aging—no positive way at least. We are sometimes surrounded by anti-aging marketing and pressure to stay young at any cost. But there is a different route—pro-aging. Getting older has so many benefits. And we can stay just as fit and healthy as ever if we take care of ourselves. Let's embrace the wisdom and life experience we've garnered. And we can look and feel good while we do.