

Exercise improves seniors' vitality and independence

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If you don't make a commitment to fighting the normal consequences of aging - the decline in physical and cognitive functioning - you dramatically increase the risk of losing your ability to live independently and decrease the quality of your life. If you do join a program, and work at it, you will dramatically increase the quality of your life and extend your independence.



Research has determined that sedentary lifestyles produce muscle mass atrophy starting somewhere in the third decade. Participants in regular physical activity involving strength and cardiovascular exercise experience greater physical functionality and psychological benefits, lower health risks and ultimately enjoy a higher quality of life than their sedentary counterparts. Research also tells us that as much as 50 per cent of disease and disability associated with aging can be attributed to inactivity and muscle disuse. As we age, regular, vigorous exercise and good nutrition become even more important. No matter at what age you start exercising, or in what de-conditioned state you're in, studies have now proven conclusively that you can substantially regain your strength, flexibility and cardiovascular capacity, in an exercise program such as Changing Aging at UBC.

The Changing Aging program specializes in older adult fitness, taking de-conditioned participants to a high level of improvement. "The participants come to UBC to become students of their own physical health," says Bob Frid of the UBC School of Human Kinetics. Participants range in age from 50 to 89 and attend classes on campus three times a week in a specially-designed fitness facility. "We train them as though they were serious athletes that have mild limitations," says Frid. UBC's Changing Aging is one of the only programs of its kind in North America. "All of our programs are based on extensive research. Senior Faculty Advisor Barry Legh and Program Coordinators Behnad Honarbakhsh and Christina Joe have designed functional training programs



specifically for seniors with a focus on co-ordination, balance and resistance training. The instructor-led, exercise system, is taught by carefully selected UBC students who have received specialized training from experts in exercise physiology for older adults. Undergraduate and graduate students from the UBC School of Human Kinetics train for a summer before becoming instructors in the Changing Aging program. Frid says the life changes in many of the participants both student trainers and participants has been close to miraculous. "It's very interesting watching them work," he says. Each program has three components: aerobic exercise, strength training and stretching.

Medically approved exercise machines mean load settings can be electronically adjusted without interruption and, more importantly, without heavy lifting or awkward movements that can be difficult for older adults. Some of the machines, such as the recumbent bikes, are designed to minimize strain to the lower back, an important feature for those with impaired mobility or osteoporosis. "The social aspect is also very important," says Frid. Fear of isolation and loneliness is a motivating factor for many participants, all of whom work out in a very safe and comfortable centre that focuses on group fitness and interaction with one another and the student trainers. Individual attention ensures that the workouts are sufficiently demanding. The first step towards physical improvement is always the most difficult - it is the decision to START. Take control of the aging process and make an investment in your health by joining Changing Aging , which aims to make your Fitness Age lower - much lower - than your chronological age. After all, being fit, healthy and strong and enjoying life should be what the retirement years are all about.

The Changing Aging Exercise Program is a specialty community outreach unit of the UBC School of Human Kinetics - Changing Aging Classes run between 7 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. with four overlapping classes daily. For more information or to register call 604-822-0207 or www.hkin.educ.ubc.ca/fitness/index.html