

# "Five Fitness & Exercise Tips for Healthy Aging"

by Lee Albert, NMT

Have you ever been told that you should expect aches and pains because you're getting older?

Well, don't believe it.

One of my clients came to me complaining of low back pain. Her doctor had examined her and ordered an MRI. The MRI revealed nothing significant. The doctor told her that she should expect this sort of thing as she was now getting older.

She didn't look very old to me. I asked her, How old are you? 29, she said. OK, I said, maybe you want to find another doctor.

I treated her for low back pain that was due to muscle imbalances in the hip flexors and her pain went away almost immediately.

The truth is most people do have more pain as they age but it is not because they are older but because they have had their muscle imbalances for a longer time. These imbalances pull the bones out of alignment resulting in various aches, pains and conditions.

I am 62 years young and I have very few aches and pains. At 42 I had a lot of aches and pains, not because I was older but because I didn't know how to correct my muscle imbalances and I wasn't using common sense in my life style choices.

I want to share with you five tips I use for myself and recommend to my clients for feeling great at any age. These common sense ideas don't take much time and they will help you to have more energy and less pain as you age.

## **Sit Up Straight**

This might seem like a small thing, but your mother was right when she told you to sit up straight. In my opinion the number one cause of muscle imbalances is the way we sit. I estimate that about 50% of all the pain I treat is caused or aggravated by the way a person is sitting. Sitting straight can reduce or eliminate a great amount of your pain.

I know it is very difficult to sit up straight but it becomes very easy if you use a small cushion or lumbar support. Place the cushion in the small of the low back just above the hip bones. Make sure it is thick enough to bring your head back over your shoulders. Do not make it too thick as this will cause some discomfort. This should feel as if you could stay there all day.

This will not only help with your aches and pains but will greatly improve your sitting and standing posture over time. Remember that people who have a bent over posture look old. Sitting or standing up straight always looks 10 years younger.

## **Drink Enough Water**

Everyone knows that they should drink more water but unless they have compelling reasons very few people will drink enough for optimal hydration. If you are not drinking enough water you can expect your muscles to ache more, your joints to ache more, your memory to have lapses and oh yes, more wrinkles in the skin. All of those symptoms are associated with aging. Most older people who come to me for treatment tell me that they don't drink very much water. When people start to drink 6-8 glasses of water daily they usually start to see improvement in few months.

## **Exercise**

When you stop moving that is when you start to look and feel old. Exercise increases the heart rate which in turn can then pump blood and oxygen to your brain and tissues. Muscles and soft tissue that have good circulation and hence more oxygen ache less than tissue and muscle that is low in oxygen. Exercise will also help you to keep your muscles strong and help prevent loss of muscle size.

As for brain function one study showed that people who did moderate exercise at least 2 hours per week had better short and long term memory than those who exercised less.

Nothing fancy is required here. 20 - 30 minutes a day of moderate walking will make you feel better and improve your memory.

## **Stretch**

Stretching the right muscles can help correct your life time of muscle imbalances making you look straighter and younger and as a result have less pain. I recommend these 3 stretches be done a few times every day.

Stretch your chest.

Consistent stretching of the chest will open up that area and bring your head back over your shoulders so you have better posture. Try this stretch twice a day:

Squeeze shoulder blades together gently. This will stretch the chest muscles and release tension between the shoulder blades. Hold for at least two minutes.

Stretch the front of your thigh.

These muscles are called the quadriceps. This stretch will help to bring your pelvis back into alignment which can help with low back pain. Try this stretch twice a day:

Hold on to the back of a chair to help keep your balance. Reach back with one hand and bring the heel towards the butt. Feel the stretch in the front of the upper leg. Hold for 1 minute.

Stretch your neck.

This will help loosen the tight muscles in that area and bring in more blood and oxygen to the area and help with that achy feeling.

Pull your head to one side as if trying to bring your ear to your shoulder. Hold 1 minute and repeat on the other side.

These stretches will help you look and feel better.

Remember these stretches should always be gentle and cause no pain.

## **Exercise Your Brain**

Many older people start to have cognitive decline. However, I have met many seniors who are sharp as a tack. Their secret is simple. They keep their mind active and engaged. Read a book, do a crossword puzzle or research a topic that holds some interest for you. Anything that will keep your mind active will work.

Remember these tips are great and will help you as you age but reading them will not help. You actually have to make them a habit in your life. A little effort will pay big dividends.

Here's to healthy aging!