

Looking after Number One!

Have you often wondered what you should be doing to stay healthy and strong? Do you get tired and lose stamina easily; do you find joints are achy and sore? I often have clients telling me they feel like this and believing the answer is to rest...YES, rest in moderation but the most important answer is staying active.

I remember a few years ago a lady joining one of my Pilates classes who made a particular impression on me; Muriel was lovely, well dressed, and exuberant, she expressed a self assured, poised confidence that gave her an attractive presence. All of the people in my class were drawn to her. Although Muriel couldn't do all of the exercises, she would rest on the more difficult ones by just relaxing and then would rejoin when it suited her. This lovely lady was so in tune with her body and so motivated! When I found out that she was 83 yrs old and had started exercise at 63 for the first time, I was truly amazed. It was another experience for me that gave me more insight and understanding into what I do and how it is so beneficial. There was no doubt in my mind that Muriel's attitude and health were due to her weekly Yoga, Tai chi and Pilates.

Physical activity is more powerful than any medication you can take. If there are physical problems that prevent regular exercise, then moderate activity will still make a difference; it's just a case of doing the right type of exercise for you. Something is better than nothing. (Check with your healthcare advisor).

Sitting in a chair and turning the head slowly from side to side; shrugging the shoulders; lifting the arms and mobilising the shoulder joints; extending the legs whilst sitting with a straight spine and stretching the hamstrings, will all result in some improvement if practiced regularly. Breathing deeply or sitting quietly, whilst being aware of your breath will help to relax you and improve lung capacity. With practice you will find these simple exercises becoming easier, and then it is time to increase the intensity of the activity and progress.

As time goes on as it surely does, if we do nothing to help ourselves then we start to become frail as the muscles weaken and deteriorate. Frailty in old age often leads to the loss of independence and this can be prevented.

Our bodies are designed for movement, our spine needs to be mobilised and the muscles that support it need to be strengthened, otherwise they literally shrivel. The spine becomes unable to support itself as it used to and we shrink. This results in a chain of problems that reverberate throughout our whole body and system. If we don't strengthen our bones through weight bearing activities and exercise, then the natural thinning of the bones will just continue. Our balance mechanism in the brain, if not stimulated also deteriorates as we get older. So now what do we have? A weaker skeletal system, thinner bones and a loss of balance; - each year almost one third of adults over the age of 65 fall and end up hospitalised and in the worst cases it will be fatal. **This could so easily be prevented.**

Why wouldn't we want to fight against the ageing process when we have the opportunity to do so? We live much longer now and that is partly due to advancements in medicine and a better understanding of physiology. So if we have a chance to look better, feel better and live longer, why not take advantage of this knowledge?

The other benefit to exercising which most of us are aware of now is that it releases endorphins in the brain that help us to feel happier and more positive.

If you don't believe me give it a try for 6 weeks, **you have nothing to lose**. Also remember, the ageing process starts in your late 20's, so it is never too early or too late to start taking care of our bodies!!

(Check with your healthcare provider before embarking on any new exercise programme, particularly if you have back or joint problems; recent injuries or illnesses.)

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