

Old, Wise and Stiff? - Why Mobility is Important for Senior Citizens

As we grow older, our quality of lives are directly affected by how fit we are. It dictates everything from what activities we can do to how quickly we can go from point A to B to how easily we can change the shape of our bodies to do various tasks. That last point is what mobility is about. The more mobile we are, the easier it is for us to do things in daily life.

For us to do any type of physical work we need to change the shape and alignment of our bodies. For example, to pick up something from the floor we need to make our legs shorter and our arms longer in addition to staying in alignment with our centre of mass so as to not topple over. We take these things for granted but without sufficient mobility this change in shape won't happen very easily or gracefully.

Why?

Because mobility is a result of how well we're able to control our muscles and, hence, our joints. If we can excellent control on all our joints, that means that all the muscles connected to every joint are functioning well and we are able to recruit those muscles on command as and when we see fit.

Take the knee joint for example. If we have optimal mobility at the knee, that means that we have control over the muscles and other connective tissue attached to the knee. And by using them right and at the right time, we are able to create proper movement at the knee joint. So is the case with every other joint in the body. And if we lose control on any or a few of these joints, general movement becomes extremely hard and quality of life drops.

So, as we age, it is critical that we ensure proper mobility in as many, if not all, joints.

Here is how we do that -

1. **Do not stop moving because of age.** If there is an activity you've been doing for a while (say a sport, walking, running, swimming or yoga), continue with it as you age. Your body is a machine that requires movement to stay healthy. Do not use age as a reason to stop being active.

2. **Constantly train full body multi-joint movements** at proper range of motions. Squats,

pushups, hinges, burpees, rows are all excellent movements for the elderly when they are done using optimal range of motion and the right intensity. If you are not sure about doing this right, find a coach who can help you with this.

3. Find joints that are less unhealthy and work on them specifically. For example, the hip joint might be tighter than the rest or the elbow joint may have some laxity. Once you identify the joint, work on optimally strengthening or stretching the muscles and connected tissue attached to those joints. Once again, reach out to a coach or a physical therapist if you aren't sure about how to approach this.

4. Ensure you get sufficient sunlight and consume enough calcium. Bones lose minerals and become brittle with age and so getting enough vitamin D (preferably through sunlight) and consuming foods rich in calcium are critical.

5. Constantly work on improving your quality of movement. The (mindless) things you did when you were younger may not suit you well anymore. As you get older, how well you move means so much more than how much you move. So take the time and effort to learn the proper way to do each exercise and movements of daily life and practice them over and over again.

6. Practice lying down and standing up. Simple, every day actions are what you need to do more of. Nothing complex. Practice this daily.