

Fitness for life

There are some important exercise guidelines to follow as you head into your 40s, 50s and beyond. And to enjoy the best health benefits, you need to make sure you're doing fitness right.

Once an elite Ironman athlete, Guy Leech is a living example of how to keep your body strong through all stages of life. As the director of Guy Leech Fitness, he believes that a lifelong commitment to exercise offers endless benefits beyond physical health.

"It also clears the mind and releases endorphins in your body," Guy said. "These are your natural happy drugs, so it makes you feel good."

The trick is to work around the issues of an ageing body by recognising your limitations and understanding how your body responds to exercise. Here are Guy's top 5 tips for staying healthy and strong at any age.

Tip 1. Don't punish your body

Guy's own fitness level is not only thanks to the exercises he does, but also the ones he's given up.

"The human body becomes less malleable the older you get," Guy said. "Some injuries can become bigger problems, as we start to see signs that we're not as young as we used to be."

After the age of 40, he recommends cutting down on impactful exercise that could put stress on your body.

"You should do less running and cross-fit, and more exercises like bike riding, swimming, walking or kayaking – things that don't put huge strain on joints and tendons."

Tip 2. Mix it up

If you're doing the same exercise all the time, you're at risk of repetition injury – so Guy suggests changing your exercise program regularly.

"It's easy to think you're safe doing what you've always done," he said. "But a good strategy is to mix things up by swimming one day, doing yoga the next, and walking the day after."

Not only will you avoid strain this way, but it actually helps build fitness.

"A lot of people stay in their comfort zone when they exercise," Guy said. "But when your body gets used to something, it doesn't build muscle tissue."



Tip 3. Strength training is vital

As the body ages, the most important form of exercise is related to strength rather than stamina – as our bones begin to lose density and muscle tissue decreases.

Guy commented: "Muscles burn 70% to 90% of the body's blood sugar, so they help keep weight down and reduce incidence of Type 2 diabetes. And muscles load up the bones, encouraging them to maintain their density."

But weight training doesn't have to mean a gym membership. It could be standing up from a chair repeatedly or doing push-ups against a table – as long as you're doing it twice a week.¹

Tip 4. Improve your balance

In Guy's experience, once you're of a certain age, you tend to avoid situations where you're required to balance. This leads to slower physical reactions and to more falls.

Balance exercises can be as simple as standing on one leg for as long as possible as the kettle boils or during TV commercials, or walking along a line on the floor as if you're on a tightrope. As your balance improves, you can combine it with strength exercises – for example, standing on one foot while doing bicep curls.

Tip 5. Measure your progress

By keeping track of your progress, you'll stay motivated to continue exercising on a regular basis. And the easiest way to do that is with a tape measure around the waist, according to Guy.

"It's less about your weight and more about the circumference of your waist," he said. "Fat in the stomach area can grow around your internal organs, which can be dangerous."

¹ Department of Health, *Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines*, July 2014

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