

Moderate Exercises For Elderly

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"I am in my 60's and am reasonably well. Do you favor calisthenics for people of my age? For 10 minutes a day? Half an hour?

"Is walking a better exercise? How far? A mile? Or two or three? Including some hills?"—W. R.

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LET'S ANSWER IT this way: I favor daily exercise for everybody of any age — within their limitations. Even a person who is bedridden needs exercise to some extent. Maybe in some cases it will be no more than wiggling or moving the toes, or turning over in bed, or a massage or physical therapy. Even being turned from side to side, if the patient can't do it for himself, is important.

Exercise, in whatever amount, does a great deal more than tone up the muscles. It is important in maintaining blood circulation. It has a marked and useful effect on the efficiency of our breathing. It aids digestion. And so on.

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AS TO THE AMOUNT or the kind, I refuse to try to specify sight unseen. Ten minutes of calisthenics could be too much for a person with a bad heart. An hour would not be excessive for a sound person of the same age who has become accustomed to the routine.

If everyone (except those who have some medical condition prohibiting it) got into the habit of doing 5 or 10 minutes of brisk calisthenics every day, and of walking a mile, we would be a healthier nation.

But exercise shouldn't be a chore or drudgery. Once you begin to feel the invigorating results, it should become a pleasure. Even the most prosaic of sitting up exercises, or bending or stretching, can be fun.

The amount depends on you and your basic health. If you huff and puff, feel shortness of breath, tend to black out, or develop chest pains from brief exercise, you are overdoing it. (And you doubtless need a checkup by your doctor.)

I doubt that people of 60 need a half hour of calisthenics; if they enjoy that much, or more, okay. The amount you enjoy is a very good gauge of how much is proper for you.

The person who has had but little exercise shouldn't go on a sudden athletic binge, or try to crowd a week's calisthenics into a single Saturday. If you haven't been exercising much, then work into it gradually. That is true for young athletes when they start training. It is just as true for anyone else. And exercise regularly for best results.