

Senior Fitness

General Information

Senior Fitness Training is beyond the scope of this manual. The following information is intended to inform the prospective trainer of the special requirements of this type of client. As in every population group, senior levels of fitness vary. However, with seniors there is a thin line between fitness training and rehabilitation. Unless you are a licensed exercise physiologist, you should not attempt to rehabilitate clients or exercise the frail. The senior candidate must have a doctor's physical exam and a doctor's clearance issued for him or her to participate in an exercise program and to what degree with any limitations noted. As a personal trainer you are responsible for the well being of your clients. Don't take chances with their lives.

The client may be willing to endure pain in the expectation that it will be required to get in shape again. Careful observation should be made of the senior client to ensure that they are not over loading themselves. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) has set guidelines for Senior Fitness. You can reach them from our website. This manual will cover some general information concerning the senior client.

Aerobic Training

ACSM guidelines recommend a beginning aerobic exercise program minimum duration of 20 minutes and a frequency of three times per week. It is important to remember that flexibility and bone strength are reduced in the senior client. High impact exercises are not recommended. Include a 10 to 15 minute warm-up period of slow rhythmic limbering type exercises.

Heart rate checks may be inconclusive since heart response is slowed. Therefore, the Rate of Perceived Exertion (RPE) along with a heart rate check might be a better indicator. The RPE is subjective and may be clouded by the client's willingness to get in shape. In addition, the trainer must use other signs as feedback, i.e., facial expressions, breathing, eye movements, skin color, etc.

Walking is an excellent aerobic exercise even if done in place. Jogging is high impact and should only be done by the experienced client. Swimming, also an aerobic exercise, should only be attempted by the experienced client. Water aerobics is an excellent exercise for the older population. It provides light resistance without impact.

Stretching is important and should be kept to less than full range of motion followed by static stretches. Be careful not to over stretch. Concentrate on slow, sustained stretching.

Overhead arm stretches assist in breathing and allow the entry of more oxygen into the lungs opening up the thoracic cavity. The atrophication of chest muscles can cause breathing difficulty. These muscles are used to lift and expand the thoracic cavity during inhalation.

Traditional dances done at weddings are a good idea. The dances are simple, well known and not strenuous. They also provide a mood-lifting environment that promotes good health.

Weight Training

Weight resistance is initially not recommended. It should only be used with the experienced exerciser. Add light resistance rubber exercise bands and then light weight hand weights. Keep in mind that getting up and down for the older population may be difficult. Therefore, floor exercises may be difficult. Develop routines that use a chair or the wall for support. Try single leg raises while seated. Upper body exercises may be done while seated. Arm raises both front and side, leg extension, Biceps flexion and upright row can all be done while seated to avoid stressing the client. Avoid exercises that allow the head to be in extreme positions or move rapidly so as not to invoke dizziness.

Nutrition

In addition to their doctor's recommendations:

- Eat a small, easily digestible snack (such as crackers) prior to exercise.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after exercise to prevent dehydration.
- Older populations lose their sensitivity to thirst and subsequently dehydrate easier.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothes to avoid movement restrictions.

All Rights Reserved © [Arab British Academy for Higher Education](http://www.abahe.co.uk)