

Episode 057: Middle-Aged Exercise and Nutrition

This is The TD Fitness Podcast with Coach T: Episode Number 57.

Welcome to The TD Fitness Podcast, giving you healthy living insights for your physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being. And now, your host, certified health coach and personal trainer, Coach T.

Hey guys. Thanks so much for joining me here. I am Coach T from tdfitness.net, and I teach people how to live a healthy lifestyle without having to give up the things that make life worth living. I'm a certified health coach and personal trainer, and the host of The TD Fitness Podcast, and creator of the Fit Life Program. Now, a few days ago, I asked a question to all of you, the followers and subscribers to TD Fitness. I asked for your pain points, the things that you're struggling with from day to day from a health and fitness perspective. I asked for the one or two things that if we were to sit down and have coffee, the things that you would lead off with to ask me. I've gotten a lot of feedback, and I really, really appreciate that. Here, what I wanted to do was to go a little deeper into one of the responses I got to that question.

So, this question comes from, I'll call him BM. He says, "I've been told that I have entered an age group, 55 years old now, where I need to do high intensity workouts rather than endurance-style workouts. Any thoughts on workouts that fit this profile?" Then he follows up with, "My other challenge is diet as my metabolism slows. What things should a 'geriatric' do or look to include in their diet as they reduce the quantity of what they eat." I think it's funny that BM refers to himself, at age 55, as geriatric. All right? So, these questions hit on several important topics. The first is that there's a lot of information out there, and it brings up the question, what are we to believe? There is so much being thrown at us, whether it's online, offline, people we know, so called experts. I mean, there's just a lot coming in, and it's hard to decipher what you should actually follow. So, we're going to talk a little bit about that here.

We're also going to talk about how aging, not necessarily old age, but getting older, which is happening to everyone by the minute, how aging affects our fitness ability, and what types of exercise are best for us as we continue to age. Finally, the same is true with nutrition, all right? I mean, things need to change as we grow older. What needs to change, or what do we need to consider from a dietary standpoint as we get older? The question also touches on this notion of doing what's right, if you will, doing the proper exercises and eating the right foods as we age. There always seems to be trade-offs between the right way to live and actually living our lives.

If you listen to The TD Fitness Podcast, in the intro, it says I give you ways to live a healthy lifestyle without giving up the things that make life worth living. That's how I led of this session here. So, it's something that I think is important to address, and I'll talk about that as well, because this notion of having a single right way to live and having to give up certain things in order to do that, that just doesn't sit well with most people. I don't think that you should have to sacrifice those types of things in order to live a healthy prosperous life. So, we're going to talk a little bit about that.

Now, I'll start with this notion of all of the information that we're getting that's coming at us from so many different channels and avenues. There's a term called infobeasity. You may have heard it before. I believe I've mentioned it on a podcast. One of my partners over at the Better Nutrition, the registered dieticians over there, Ashley, she's used that term, and she's spoken about it before. I think it's an appropriate and very applicable term. Basically, infobeasity is just having too much information, so much, that you can't decipher what is right, what's wrong, what you should believe. So, there's so much out there. I mentioned this before, but we should all be diligent about seeking credible sources. If the source or the person that you're getting your advice from isn't knowledgeable on that topic, then they should refer you to someone who is.

Now, BM, I will say that what you were told about having to incorporate interval type exercises isn't necessarily untrue, but there's also a little more to the story. So, the comment likely stemmed from, or maybe it didn't, but it could've come from anywhere, but when I was researching the latest literature in this area of study, I came across a pretty prominent study done in 2017. It was conducted by a male clinic diabetes researcher, and the results were subsequently published in a journal called Cell Metabolism in March 2017. So, if you're not up on cell metabolism, then I'll tell you a little bit about this. But, basically, the takeaway, according to the author, a Dr. Nayer, was that any exercise is better than no exercise.

But interval training is, "Highly efficient in reversing many age-related changes in older adults, even more so than in younger adults." So, this is good information to have, okay? But, we have to ask, is that really surprising? I mean, the benefits of interval training, whether it's increased calorie burn, or just being able to accomplish more work in a shorter period of time, the fact that your cardiovascular system works harder, which is a good thing from time to time, and that there's less repetitive motion on the joints when you compare an interval workout to, for example, a longer cardiovascular or aerobic endurance session, those are the benefits of interval training. They apply to everyone.

But what the study really shows is additional data supporting the fact that as we age, exercise becomes increasingly important. There were things that I could get away with doing, or healthy things that I could get away with not doing, simply because I was younger years ago, just because I was young. But that amount of, I'll call it healthy living slack, that slack decreases as we age. So, the point of this study was actually to show changes at the cellular level. That's interesting science for sure, but what I want you all to understand is that from the cellular to the neurological to the mental to the emotional levels, exercise is beneficial all around, and it's more of a requirement as we get older. Now, to address BM's question directly, let me lay a quick foundation of how our fitness needs change as we get older.

So, when I say older, in health and fitness terms, when you're talking about developing programs for "an older population," typically, that number is associated with age 65 and above. Now, BM is only 55 years old, but I'll tell you that this applies to all of us, because being "older" is not an either-or, it's a scale that we move through as we age. As we age, there are a number of changes that occur. So, after age 50, there's a noticeable reduction in muscle mass, especially in women, because women who lose muscle mass at about twice the rate as men do, because they naturally have lower levels of testosterone anyway, but the loss in lean muscle mass is usually associated with less activity, and it's usually accompanied by increases in fat due to dietary changes and reduced activity. So, it's important to note too that the less lean muscle mass you have, the fewer calories you're going to burn from day to day. So, it's kind of a vicious cycle. So, that's one thing to consider, your muscle mass is going to decrease as you age.

Next, our flexibility tends to get worse as we age, mainly because we don't devote as much time to stretching as we used to. But, we also tend to be more sedentary as we age. I mean, it seems like the typical path or progression in our society. Professional athletes even, they get less playing time as they reach the end of their careers. Even in my career, and a military career, it's the younger folks who are out doing the action, doing the things, and I'm stuck behind a desk at this point. We all tend to just move less as we age, and that creates stiff joints and less limber muscles. You couple that with the typical added responsibilities of family, and work, and kid activities, and social events, and there's less and less time to devote to flexibility and mobility exercise, or exercise in general for that matter. It's not as much of an issue when we're young, but it's more of an issue as we age. But once again, the more often you move, the better off you are. So, I'll get into some of the specifics of that here in a little bit.

Next, we simply have more aches and pains as we age, okay? These pains manifest themselves largely due to the muscular imbalances that become worse over time. That goes back to the flexibility piece. But they come about because we age, okay? I mean, I drive a vehicle that's over 12 years old now, and believe me, I am experiencing firsthand the effects of age on that machine that has moving parts. The body, in some ways, is no different. The body of course, is a much more capable machine than my SUV for sure, but the point is that wear and tear comes with time. So, where we go wrong though, is in thinking that those aches and pains should prevent us from exercising. Usually, the contrary is true. Restarting or being more consistent with the exercise that we're already doing, that is what can really help us with those minor annoyances, and those aches and those pains, all right?

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... us with those minor annoyances and those aches and those pains, all right?

Another change that comes with age is the length of time that it takes to recover from any kind of seemingly strenuous activity, so our recovery periods just get longer. Exercise helps with this because it exposes the body to activity on a more frequent basis, and like anything that's practiced over time, it's dealt with more efficiently. By the way, exercise increases blood flow and circulation which brings repair to those damaged areas of your body at a quicker rate.

Also our cardiac output, which is basically the amount of blood that's pumped out by the heart over time, our cardiac output lowers as we age. Cardiac output is really a function of a couple of different things. It's heart rate, which is how often our heart beats, typically measured in a minute, and stroke volume, which is the amount of blood that's pushed into the arteries with each heart beat. Our cardiac output decreases with age because stroke volume and heart rate are both lower, but regular exercise can help maintain stroke volume, and therefore help with the natural decrease in cardiac output. This is important because it's quite literally the life blood of our existence, okay? Exercise is that important.

So how do we counter each one of these things? Circling back to B.M.'s question, what exactly should we do for exercise? How much? How often? I'll throw the obligatory, the mandatory disclaimer here now, before starting anything new, any exercise program, if you're not active right now, you need to consult your physician, okay? And even if you are exercising but it's not consistently and you're thinking about ramping things up, talk to your doctor because they're more intimately familiar with your personal health situation and scenario.

Now, let's start with cardiovascular activity. The recommended amount of cardio for adults does not change with your age. It's 150 minutes of moderate activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity each week, or some kind of combination of the two. For your moderate intensity cardio, you could do 30 minutes a day five days a week. If you're exercising vigorously, it could be 20 to 25 minutes a day on three days a week. Low-impact aerobics are always good for us as we age because it's easier on the joints, but high-intensity workouts versus low-intensity steady state cardio, this is what B.M. asked about.

I will tell you that both are important, so each builds your cardiovascular capacity in a different way. If you're not doing high-intensity work, then I think it's smart to incorporate some into your routine, but don't go overboard, because depending on how intense your high-intensity sessions are, I mean one to two times a week is plenty, and when you're doing interval training and things like that, 20 to 30 minutes is more than adequate for high-intensity work. I'm going to link to a blog post I did on interval training so you can check that out, and there's some more information on it there.

I'll say too that with a Fit Life Program that we offer, there's a three month exercise program that comes as a bonus with that plan, and there are interval training workouts and routines for different modes of exercise, whether it's walking and running, using a spin bike, a row machine, there's interval sessions each week included in that exercise bonus in the Fit Life Program.

Now, onto strength training. So when it comes to strength or resistance or muscular endurance training, the recommendation is two to three times a week. Again, that's the same recommendation for all adults, but what's different is the recommended intensity for older adults. As you age, the recommendation is to use a scale called RPE or a rating of perceived exertion. You could have any range of numbers in there you want. Typically and the most easiest for people to relate to is a zero to 10 scale where zero is hardly any effort and 10 is like all out effort. You want to shoot for a rating of perceived exertion or RPE of about five to six on a zero to 10 scale, so you're not going all out, and you want to consider about eight to 10 exercises typically done on two nonconsecutive days of the week. Use an amount of weight or resistance that allows for about 10 to 15 reps of exercise.

It could be body weight that you use. You don't have to load up on barbells and dumbbells. I do a lot of body weight training, particularly in the training season for my endurance races, because remember too with body weight ... let's use an example of push-ups, so if I prescribe 10 to 15 reps of push-ups for each set of exercises, each set of push-ups that you do, but you can crank out 30, then that's okay. It's easy to modify that simply by varying the speed with which you conduct the movement. If you can crank out 30 push-ups in 30 seconds or a minute even, if you slow that down to half as fast, you'll probably be able to do about 12, maybe 15 reps of push-ups. I'm talking very slow, very methodical. That's a good way to keep the reps in the range you want to, but still use your body weight to perform those exercises.

An added benefit of using your body weight is that you gain a better proprioceptive awareness of your balance and limitations, which that's a benefit as we age. What that basically means is that you get better at balancing and fall prevention because your body has a better sense of where it is in relation to everything else. That's one of the things that tends to decline as we get much older in our lives.

I'll also point out for one of the strength sessions in my personal routine, I like to focus on core work, meaning your core musculature. That includes your abdominal region, so your abs, your transverse and obliques on the side there running through the side, and then your lower back as well. All of that's going to be important, all of that is part of the core, and all of that

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counts as strength or resistance training. Again, the exercise bonus with the Fit Life Program includes those core exercises as well.

I have to address something too that I see quite a bit as we continue to age. A lot of people I work with, a lot of the guys I work with actually, as they age, they tend to exercise the way that they did 20 years ago, meaning there's a lot of weight training and not a lot of cardiovascular activity. I will tell you that I don't want you to sacrifice heart health for excess weight training. I'm glad that you're working out if you're one of those people that does primarily just weight training exercises. It's better than doing nothing for sure. It certainly beats sitting around all day, but understand that what's important as you age, particularly as you age, is going to be to take care of the ticker, take care of your heart, and one of the best ways to do that is through cardiovascular activity, all right?

Now, flexibility and mobility. The recommendation is two to three flexibility sessions per week, and really the minimum recommendation I'll say is about 10 minutes for each one of those sessions. Now again, these are minimums. I do a lot more than that for flexibility because I know I need to and I feel so much better after I do. I also have a resource too. What I'll do is once I hang this episode on the website, I'll actually link or include a freebie to the TD Fitness stretch sequence. It's one that I created a few years back, and it is very effective at hitting the muscle groups that you need to focus on on a regular basis. I've used it for a number of years now, and it is a very good resource. I highly recommend it.

Another resource I use is one that I pay for, and it's called Romwod.com, that's R-O-M-W-O-D, Romwod.com. It's basically daily stretch routines of about 15 to 20 minutes each. They put out a new one every day, and it's \$14 a month, but I think it's well worth it in my opinion. Like I said, I use it regularly, so it's a good service.

Now, again, keep in mind that those recommendations for cardio, for strength and flexibility work, they're all minimums. You can do more, just be cautious of overtraining if you do decide to add on a whole lot more.

So I'm going to put a bow on this question for B.M. on the fitness question. Both interval training and steady state cardio are important when we're young and when we age, okay? Remember that intensity is relative, though. It's not relative to what everyone else is doing, so I don't want you to compare yourself to others, and it's not even relative to what you were able to do 20 years ago. Your intensity for these interval and high-intensity sessions should be based on your ability and your capacity and your capability right now, so compare yourself to your recent past self. That's how you get those wins and you see consistent improvement.

A good gauge for aerobic exercise intensity like I said is your RPE or your rating of perceived exertion, and again, you can vary that as you feel you're being challenged, okay, but that's a good way to compare from one workout to the next your level of effort. An even easier way to gauge is through what's called the talk test, and I won't dive into that again here, but I did address that in Episode Number 38 of the podcast, and I'll link to that one in the show notes for this one here too.

Now, I'm going to move on to the second question B.M. asked, and that was the nutrition question, basically what should your diet look like as you get older and your metabolism slows and you're trying to reduce the quantity or the amount of what you eat. Before I answer this, I want to rephrase it, because I think the framing of the question is important. I think perhaps a better question to ask instead of thinking about reducing the quantity of what we're eating ...

Another question to ask. Instead of thinking about reducing the quantity of what we're eating, think about improving the quality of what we're eating. When I say that I'm thinking about things like fibrous foods like fruits and vegetables. The less sugar you eat the more you'll want over time, right? So stick to those naturally occurring foods. Quality also includes meal timing. So the way that you eat throughout the day not just what you eat. And quantity is important but quality is really where you make your money. You could eat less food and still have a relatively high caloric intake if your consumption is primarily simple carbs, sugars and fatty foods. So it's not only about quantity, it's not only about how much you eat.

Now, how our nutrition changes as we age. There are some things to know about here too just like there are on the fitness side. So what are those changing requirements? Now, all things being equal, your calorie requirements will generally go down and that's because your metabolism slows. I already mentioned how you have less muscle mass. The less muscle mass you have the less metabolically active your body is. So your metabolism consists of three parts. It's basically genetics, what I'll call thyroid function and the muscle mass you have. So we talked about muscle mass. As that goes down you're going to burn fewer calories per day. Genetics, the second of those three parts, you can't really change that either. You're stuck with the hand you're dealt with.

Now, thyroid function. So the thyroid gland produces hormones which regulate the body's metabolic rate as well as the heart and digestive function. Interestingly enough, this is where we get some real gender specificity because women have greater thyroid issues than men by at least a factor of 10. It's quite gradual though, so women may find that they're losing some of that metabolic edge during their mid-30s or early-40s. And that hormonal effect is huge for both men and women. I've done a podcast on this one too and go deep into the metabolism piece and I'll link to that episode too. I'm not going to rehash all of that here. But hormones play such a vital role in how we feel, aches and pain, diet, digestion, how we metabolize things, all that comes together and it's very inter ... All of those factors are very interdependent on one another.

So you may find yourself being hungrier. You can blame your hormones for that because after we hit 40 our estrogen levels fall which causes changes in our blood sugar and thyroid increasing our appetite. I mean all of these things. The levels of stress that you have, again, metabolically related. The hormones are involved in everything so eating is not just about calories. It's not just about making you full when you're hungry. It's about providing energy your body needs to thrive and it's about providing proper nutrients so you can live well. So stated another way, again, it's not the quantity but it's about the quality of what we eat.

So what's the answer, right? What is an aging individual like B.M. as he refers to himself, what's he supposed to do for nutrition? Now, if you're not proactive and deliberate, it is not uncommon to gain 30, 40 pounds throughout our middle age years. I've seen it happen. Some of us have been victim to it but that's not because we're predisposed to gain that weight. Now, I'll say that the way to prevent or offset that weight gain is pretty straightforward. So here are some things that I recommend. And by the way, if you've gained 30 or 40 pounds it's also fairly straightforward in how to lose it. I'm not saying it's easy but it is straightforward if we focus on the right things and these are some of the things that ... All of the things actually that we get into in the Fit Life Program.

I'm going to pull out just a couple of things here that I think are important to touch on. The first is to pay attention to your diet. What I mean by that is many times we just go through our daily motions not even really thinking about what we eat. We eat what we eat for

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breakfast every day because that's what we eat for breakfast. Or we come home and we have a Coke because that's what we do when we come home. We go to work. We have one of those large sugar-filled and cream-filled coffees because that's what we do when we go to work. When you start thinking about what it is that you're actually consuming, maybe logging what you eat or even just keeping track of one or two of the habits with what you're eating, kind of like we do in the Fit Life program. And either of those things can help with this. Paying attention to your diet.

So you don't just want to maintain habits just because they're habits. Stop and think about it and sometimes logging your efforts or tracking your diet or even a portion or couple of your habits or a portion of your diet can help with that. Okay? Next you want to address the areas where you're lacking first. So if you're not eating a lot of whole or natural foods or you're not eating any vegetables or you're not really drinking any water, then start there.

And there are a couple of reasons for this, for adding things to your diet versus taking away, it's because, number one, psychologically it's easier for us to add than it is to take away or stop eating something. It's just human nature. There's actually science behind that, psychology behind that and it's called the self-determination theory. We want to have some say in what we do and the decisions that we make. Secondly, and my RD partners will back me up on this, when you have the right nutrients in proper proportions you feel better and you are better able to make further healthy changes and healthy decisions. So it's important to fix the gaps first before you cut the excess.

Now, the next thing and one way to address those deficiencies is to opt for nutrient-dense foods over calorie-dense foods because all calories are not created equal. Now, again, I don't want you to solely focus on calories and quantity but you should know that in one pound of fat, you probably know this, there's 3,500 calories. Now, in one pound of spinach there are 100 calories. All right? So 3,500 calories in a pound of fat and 100 calories in a pound of spinach. Just saying. Now, up top there on the Q&A, B.M., thanks, man, for being a long-time supporter of TD Fitness and one of the first to respond to that question that I posed. I want to encourage each of you to keep the feedback rolling in. That's why I'm here and I really appreciate the feedback and I enjoy reading them. And that better prepares me to help you in the best way possible. So please keep the feedback coming.

In fact, speaking of that feedback, I got a lot of responses to my question on the biggest struggles, challenges and pain points and as I looked through those the overwhelming majority were related to one of three things, either nutrition, motivation or some time-related component like healthy living strategies for busy lifestyles. Now as I thought about that and kind of went through all of those responses, I realized that I've talked and I've written about each of these things, sometimes on more than one occasion, each of these things individually. But what I'm thinking is that it may be beneficial to create something that kind of ties all of that together and I don't want to charge for it but here's what I'm thinking.

I'm thinking of putting together a free, I'll call it a Fit Life Master Class, probably a three-part video series on how to improve your diet and stay motivated to exercise despite the crazy schedules that we're all a part of, right? So do me a favor and let me know if that's something that you would be interested in. You can just leave a comment below and let me know. I don't want to create something if it's not going to be useful but on the other hand the reason I ask for feedback is so that I can better give you what you want. So let me know if that will, indeed, help you. A free Fit Life Master class on how to improve your diet, stay motivated to exercise despite the crazy, hectic schedule. All right? Just let me know. And that my friends, is all I have for you here. I want to thank you again for joining me and offer that you have a blessed one and Coach T. signing out.

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