

Boomer Bodies: Coping with the Changes

In January 2006, the first American baby boomer turned 60. While the 79 million Americans who were born from 1946 to 1964 have changed the face of American culture, time and age are starting to catch up with them.

Boomeritis

The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons (AAOS) has noted a significant increase in the number of overuse injuries in the baby boomer generation. In fact, the AAOS coined the term “boomeritis” to describe the growing number of sports injuries in this demographic. These injuries range from tendonitis to bursitis and arthritis. The suffix “-itis” refers to inflammation.

Baby boomers are staying more active and are racking up more injuries along the way. In 1998, they accounted for more than 1 million sports injuries. From 1991 to 1998, baby boomers experienced a 33 percent increase in sports injuries which resulted in more than 365,000 hospital emergency room visits.

Preventing Injuries

Doctors and physical therapists say that staying active doesn't have to mean more injuries. Most injuries are related to overuse. If you're getting older, you need to learn to listen to your body and learn ways to prevent injuries. Here are some tips for staying injury free and active with an aging body:

- If you haven't been physically active, consult with your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.
- Include stretching in your exercise routine to maintain joint flexibility. Once your muscles have warmed up, do some gentle stretching exercises.
- Your exercise routine should include a mix of cardiovascular exercise, strength training and flexibility exercises.
- Exercise doesn't have to hurt. You may experience some muscle soreness but true pain is telling you something. Talk to your doctor, physical therapist or trainer if you are experiencing pain from an exercise.
- Don't try to add too much at one time. Work up towards your goal. If you want to be able to work out for 60 minutes a day and haven't been physically active, start with a smaller goal such as 20 minutes a day for a week and then add 10 percent more the next week and so on until you reach your goal.
- Invest in the right equipment. Wear a helmet for bicycling and buy good walking or running shoes that fit properly.
- Add some variety to your routine. Walking on a treadmill day after day can get boring. Take your walk outside or go for a bike ride. Take up dancing or join a gym class.
- Don't overdo the weights. When starting a strength training program, start light. Go for lighter weights and gradually increase as the routine becomes easy. Remember the 10 percent rule for adding weights. If you were using a 2-pound free weight, don't step up to a 10-pound weight the next week!

It's never too late to start an exercise program that can help you age in a more healthy manner. One study of wheelchair-bound nursing home residents who were in their 80s and 90s found that lifting light weights helped improve their strength and overall fitness level. So lace up your walking shoes and start moving toward your fitness goals.