

Getting Older And Getting Better

by: Karyn Engbrecht, MSNH

When you think of an older man or woman who has kept in fantastic shape...who do you think of? Does Jack LaLanne come to mind? Maybe Jane Fonda is your fitness idol. Hopefully, there will always be a celebrity on TV or on a video to remind us that fitness isn't just for the young.

I want to challenge you to look in some new places for your physical fitness mentors. How about asking that older neighbor who's always out gardening, how they stay so motivated to keep active. Perhaps you're at the park and notice a grandparent who appears to be keeping up with the grandkids and they obviously love the challenge. Ask these exceptional seniors how they've kept in good shape for so many years. Ask them what their secret is. You may be surprised at what you learn and you'll be delighted at the smile you receive when you ask.

Here are some facts I've learned over my many years of working in the Health and Fitness Industry.

- Most seniors can improve their physical and mental health at any age.
- As people age, their natural desire to move declines. Why is this?
- Young people treat old people like they're weak and feeble. Why?
- Society, in general, thinks of senior citizens as inferior weaklings who are a burden. Horrible!

Seniors First is an organization right here in Auburn who celebrates all things senior. We utilize youthful seniors in our organization by asking them to join us in helping keep Placer County seniors independent and in their homes. I am amazed at the youthfulness that springs forth when a senior realizes they are needed and useful. There are lots of "Jack LaLannes" out there, just waiting to be discovered.

Medical experts say that older adults should be active every day to maintain their health. Even if you need a walker or a cane to get around, a daily walk is possible. If you can't walk, chair exercises are a consideration!

Let's address the question of why older adults lose their desire to exercise. The list of reasons could be endless, but the main ones are poor diet, injury, illness and depression. If you don't feel good, you're not going to feel like moving. Sometimes, just the smallest amount of movement will increase your desire to be healthier.

Many people "baby" their elders and inadvertently discourage them from doing things they are still capable of doing. Go ahead and let Grandpa put the dishes away and Grandma can sweep the kitchen floor too. At least let them try. Don't discourage your elders from doing physical exercise if they have the desire. Instead, stay close to them in case they NEED your help.

Seniors are a wonderful resource on many, many levels. They have marvelous stories to tell about their past and perhaps your past too. Listen to them! Many seniors are anxious to lend a helping hand around the house or yard. Encourage them to pitch in and discover how much longer they will be vital and useful. Let's all do what we can to keep our seniors healthy and independent. Make it their turn to take out the trash!

Yours in health,

Karyn

It is the overall goal of the Placer Older Adult Advisory Commission to promote the well-being and to enhance the quality of life for older adults of Placer County by advising the Placer County Board of Supervisors and the Placer Department of Health and Human Services on issues affecting the lives of older adults. Meetings are held the 3rd Tuesday of the month at 1:00 p.m. For more information:

<http://www.placer.ca.gov/Departments/hhs/adult/OlderAdultAdvisoryCommission.aspx>

or by calling the Public Authority at (530) 886-3680.