

STAYING ACTIVE

By Susan Evans, Mason County Senior Services

Staying active is one of the best things we can do for ourselves as we grow older. The good news is that staying active doesn't require joining a gym, running a marathon, or following a complicated exercise program. The ability to maintain everyday movement needed for shopping, gardening, climbing stairs, attending community activities, or simply getting up from a chair is important for aging adults who want to remain independent. Regular physical activity helps maintain strength, balance, flexibility, and endurance.

If you haven't been active for a while but you'd like to increase your activity, start small. A few minutes of movement at a time is better than none. Gradually increase your activity as you become stronger and more comfortable. People with medical conditions or concerns about exercising should talk with their healthcare provider about activities appropriate for them before making changes. Don't risk falling by attempting activities beyond your current abilities or by walking on snow or ice.

According to the American Heart Association, "Science has linked being inactive and sitting too much with higher risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, colon and lung cancers, and early death."

Walking, working in the yard, and household chores can provide valuable movement. During cold or rainy weather, look for groups that meet up to walk inside large stores or community buildings. Go with a friend.

Simple strength and balance activities at home such as repeatedly standing up from a sturdy chair can help strengthen your legs. Holding on to a kitchen

counter while practicing gentle balance exercises can also be helpful. Check your local senior center for year-round exercise programs and evidence-based falls-prevention programs such as *A Matter of Balance* at the Ludington Senior Center (call 231-845-6841 for registration information).

In addition to exercise programs offered at your local senior center, you may have free access to the West Shore Community College (WSCC) Recreation Center if you belong to a Medicare Advantage plan or other insurance plan that provides it to members. If not, WSCC offers \$1 discount for day passes to the Recreation Center for seniors aged 60 and over.

If you like the idea of exercising at home but need structure, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) offers free membership to the GetSetUp website (getsetup.io/partner/Michigan) for Michigan adults aged 50 and over. Create a login and password, and then search using a term like "exercise" or "stretching" in the search box to find offerings for various types and levels of activities. You can also click "Classes" from the top menu to look at the calendar of all topics offered by day and time.

The American Heart Association also says that staying active can improve your sleep and cognition, reduce weight gain, reduce risk of injury from falls, and reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. It recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity per week, or a combination of both.

The Alzheimer's Association U.S. Pointer Study participants showed

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improved cognition after following a program of 30-35 minutes of moderate-to-intense aerobic activity four times a week when combined with cognitive exercises, nutrition, and regular health monitoring.

Remember, the goal isn't to move like you did when you were 30. It's to keep moving so you can continue doing as much as possible well into your later years and reduce your risk of chronic illness, disease, or injury. Start small, increase gradually, and check with your healthcare professional before starting a new exercise program.

If you or someone you know has questions about resources for seniors, please email Susan Evans at sevans@masoncountymi.gov or call 231-316-6523.

Seniors who need help finding programs and services can also contact the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan (AAAWM) at 888-456-5664 Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Another helpful resource is the **Active for Life** publication for seniors which is available at various locations throughout the community and online at either www.scottvilleareaseniorcenter.com or www.ludingtonseniorcenter.org.

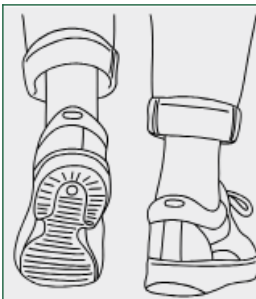
All four senior centers in Mason County offer various options for staying active. See the monthly calendar of activities for each center in the **Active for Life** publication referenced above.

Start where you are.

Use what you have.

Do what you can.

**—Arthur Ashe,
American Tennis Player**



WALK AND TALK AT SENIOR CENTERS

Ludington
Weekdays at 9:00 a.m.

Scottville
Mon · Wed · Fri at 9:00 a.m.

Buddy up to walk laps in the gym at Free Soil anytime 9:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays.

