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Joe Steckler



60's, 70's, 80's?

How long should I continue my physical fitness workouts? One might say, "For as long as I want." That could be an answer, but is it the one acceptable to you?

I was 12 years old, my family owned a restaurant, and I thought pie a la mode was a huge slice of apple pie on a dinner plate surrounded by about seven dippers of ice cream. I also weighed 212 pounds. After carrying that weight a short time, I decided to diet, lost 30 pounds, and began a muscle-building program that continued until I was 80 and suffered a stroke. One of my biggest health mistakes was failing to return to the gym after my stroke.

Doctors and physical therapists assure me that I have weathered several major health happenings because of my good physical shape, but these past few years have been a huge challenge getting back to what I want my body to do. Concurrent with some naturally occurring physical changes, I added a knee replacement that did not augur well. This and other infirmities of 80-plus years hindered my return to good health through diet and rehab.

Looking back over the last eight years, there are many things I should have done differently. Weight control was not an issue. Finding the right type of rehabilitation program was my main challenge. Admitting that I wasted several years of therapeutic workouts over a span of several years was not easy to accept.

During this period I tried all kinds of physical fitness regimens. Few worked. My problem was that I lost my ability to walk. My hamstrings became shortened because I did not exercise them by walking, as I sat too much. I had a knee oper-

ation that did not work as hoped, and the fact that I needed an operation on the other knee exacerbated my problems.

I finally decided to take more interest in my therapy. I asked questions when I talked to a new therapist. I tried several and evaluated what each was doing for me. I am now in a program three days a week and do exactly what I am told to do between sessions. I am pushed hard and, while I do not enjoy the training sessions, I look forward to each because I finally see improvement. I have excellent therapists and know that the results I want are dependent on doing the work they give me. And, that brings me to the title of today's article.

After my eight years of therapy, I notice many seniors in their 60's, 70's, and 80's, walking bent over (like me), heads on chests, thin, with no muscle definition and other signs of weakness. The majority may have slowed down but they could have prevented their physical decline had they simply asked their doctor for a referral to a physical therapist.

If you are 65, Medicare will pay for these sessions, so why not see if a therapist can help you improve your ability to walk, safely transfer from a chair to a bed, use a walking device, or improve your balance? All these things can help you as you age. Please give some thought to how you might improve your physical condition to prevent a fall or combat some other age-related problem. I have learned that help is there, but I have to find it and use it.

Contact Helping Seniors at 321-473-7770, at www.HelpingSeniorsofBrevard.org, or at P.O. Box 372936, Satellite Beach, FL 32937.

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