



# Forever young



Fitness editor **Donna Jones** reveals one of the secrets to staying youthful – it's exercise. All you need to do is put your mind, and body, to it.

**W**e all know regular exercise keeps us fit and healthy, but did you know that it can also keep you young? The catch is that you need to do the right sort of physical activity to reap the benefits, but it's never too late to start. So throw away those youth elixirs, and dig out your workout gear and sneakers.

## Slow the hands of time

Studies show that regular workouts can help to slow the hands of time. Here are five top reasons to start exercising immediately.

- 1** Regular exercise helps prevent high blood pressure, and diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and some forms of cancer.
- 2** Experts have identified stress as the top cause of ageing – regular exercise reduces the amount of stress hormones in the body.
- 3** Exercise stimulates the release of human growth hormone, which keeps muscles toned and flexible, and slows loss of bone density.
- 4** Being physically active helps you maintain a healthy weight. The Harvard School of Public Health says that people who carry excess fat around their waist have a greater risk of heart disease or cancer, and a shorter life expectancy.
- 5** Exercise keeps cells healthy – a UK study found that it preserves the length of your telomeres, which are substances that cap the edge of chromosomes much like the plastic tips on shoelaces. Longer telomeres help cell replication, slowing the ageing process.

# Anti-ageing workouts

While all exercise is beneficial, certain activities can offer specific anti-ageing benefits. Whether you're a fitness fanatic or just getting started, there's an activity to help target your ageing concerns. Try these.



## WALKING

**Why it works** Walking is a simple and effective way to maintain aerobic fitness throughout your life. It's also a gentle form of exercise and doesn't result in as much wear and tear as high-impact activities such as running. Aerobic exercise is essential for conditioning your heart, managing your weight and preventing chronic diseases such as diabetes and some forms of cancer.

**Anti-ageing prescription** Aim to walk for at least 30 minutes a day. And don't dawdle – you need to set a brisk pace to build and maintain aerobic fitness.



## STRETCHING/YOGA

**Why it works** Improving flexibility through stretching or yoga is essential for preventing the loss of movement that occurs with ageing. Yoga keeps the body supple, and increases muscle and bone strength. It also has psychological benefits: yoga promotes relaxation and combats stress, which can increase your risk of contracting serious illnesses such as heart disease.

**Anti-ageing prescription** Take one or more yoga classes each week and do some stretches at home every day. Hold each stretch for 10-30 seconds.



## QIGONG

**Why it works** Similar to Tai Chi, Chinese qigong is a 2000-year-old practice that combines flexing exercises, breathing, balance and concentration. It's believed to calm the mind, strengthen the immune system, reduce stress and improve balance and posture, all of which are important as we get older.

**Anti-ageing prescription** Take a qigong class (tai chi offers similar benefits) at least once a week or you can follow a DVD at home. Starting your day with a few sequences at home or in the park will also help.



## INTERVAL TRAINING

**Why it works** Interval training alternates bouts of sprint work with periods of light exercise. For example, cycling as fast as you can, then pedalling slowly to recover. Interval training targets fast-twitch muscle fibres that dwindle with age, and boosts levels of human growth hormone, which many believe has anti-ageing properties.

**Anti-ageing prescription** Experts recommend 15-20 minutes of interval training several times a week. Simply go all-out for 10-30 seconds – by running, swimming, walking or cycling as fast as you can – then go more slowly to recover and repeat.



## WEIGHT TRAINING

**Why it works** Both muscle mass and strength decline with age. Resistance training counteracts this, and also prevents the loss of bone mass, which can lead to osteoporosis. Weight training also boosts levels of human growth hormone.

**Anti-ageing prescription** Try lifting weights for at least 30 minutes, two or three times a week. For maximum benefit, get a qualified gym instructor or personal trainer to draw you up a program of resistance exercises to suit your level of fitness. They'll also show you how to handle the weights correctly and safely.



## MIND/BODY EXERCISE

**Why it works** Many people experience memory loss as they age. Regular exercise has been shown to boost brain function and reduce the risk of dementia. For an extra boost, choose activities that work mind and body to improve mental agility.

**Anti-ageing prescription** Take part in brain-boosting exercise at least once a week. As well as yoga, qigong and Tai Chi (see above), other activities with a mind/body connection include pilates, martial arts and dancing, each helping to sharpen focus and coordination. Or try sociable and stimulating sports, such as golf or tennis.