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If you don't like your house, you can move. If you're not satisfied with your occupation, you can change it. The one thing you're stuck with for a lifetime is your body, so why is it so many of us neglect our life-long home?

Now more than ever people are out-living their expectations, but with diseases like obesity, Type 2 diabetes and depression on the rise, this trend can easily be reversed.

The good news is most of these diseases are preventable, and by simply taking care of the body by providing it exercise, a proper diet and routine medical attention, people now, and for generations to come, will long surpass age 100.

Although experts agree taking care of the body from a young age is optimal, it is never too late to enhance the quality of life. In fact, the body and its needs change significantly with each decade, so no matter where you're at on the aging scale, it's not too late to step it up. Your best years could be yet to come.

## **20s: The decade to develop life-long habits**

Twenty-year-olds are busy juggling school and work early on, then beginning a career, getting married or even starting a family. That can make for a challenging decade, not to mention struggling to afford nutritious meals and finding time to exercise.

However, to their advantage, 20-year-olds reach supreme bone density around age 24, as well as reach their muscular peak in this decade, making exercise easier and recovery faster. Now is the time, experts say, to start incorporating daily exercise and healthy eating habits to form life-long rituals.

Dr. Philo Rogers of New Image Family Medicine in Ahwatukee Foothills recommends paying attention to calcium intake during the 20s in order to build a strong foundation for bone density before it's too late.

"People are always saying, 'When I turn whatever age I'm going to start taking care of myself,' but we need to start taking care of ourselves much earlier," Rogers said, adding that he's seeing more and more 20-year-olds deficient in vitamin B12 and folic acid, findings that are common in the elderly tested for dementia.

"The fact is people in their 20s don't always have the best diet," said Jennifer Koslo, MS, RD, CSSD and owner of SportsNutritionOnline4U.com. "They need a lot of calories and have little time for food preparation."

Koslo recommends 20-year-olds eat multiple meals and snacks throughout the day and focus on getting enough calories, fluids and rest. Men in their 20s have a higher metabolic rate than women, due to a significantly less amount of body fat and more lean muscle mass. Therefore, they need even more calories to support daily activity.

"We only have until mid-30s to accumulate bone mass, so diet is more critical in the 20s for women," Koslo said.

Rogers recommends 20-year-olds see a doctor for a physical exam and basic blood work every two to three years in order to check for liver, kidney, cholesterol and thyroid issues, as well as B12 and folic acid deficiencies.

### **30s: The decade to re-evaluate**

After age 30 muscle mass decreases by about four percent each decade, which in turn decreases metabolism and caloric needs.

“The real key is, if you stay active you can prevent decline in muscle mass and chronic diseases,” Koslo said. “Strength training really needs to be incorporated in the 30s.”

For women, bone density also decreases by about 1 percent each year from age 30 to menopause. Koslo said strength training also helps take the stress off aging bones.

Koslo recommends three to five days of cardiovascular activity a week along with two to three days of strength training and flexibility.

“As we get older, our calorie needs typically decline because we lose muscle mass, but if we stay active we can prevent that,” Koslo said.

Staying fit may mean working harder in the 30s, but then why is it we see the majority of marathon runners in this decade?

Because fast-twitch muscle fibers are lost before slow-twitch, it is easier for an older body to engage in endurance activities than sprint activities. However, it is important to keep in mind that failing to incorporate strength training could jeopardize connective tissue around joints and cause 30-year-olds to be more prone to injury.

Koslo recommends incorporating more omega-3 fatty acids and less trans fat in the diet of a 30-year-old. Skipping meals also slows metabolism, so Koslo recommends never skipping breakfast.

As maintenance, Rogers recommends a physical exam every two to three years for 30-year-olds, incorporating basic blood work to check for liver, kidney, cholesterol and thyroid issues, as well as B12 and folic acid deficiencies.

### **40s: The decade of balance**

Rogers refers to the 40s as the magical age.

“A lot of changes occur in the body when we hit 40,” he said. “This is when men and women need to start yearly physical exams. The only way we’re going to catch something is to test for it.”

Women start mammograms every one to two years after age 40 and, according to Rogers, prostate testing in men is now recommended because of increasing instances of early prostate issues.

Additionally, people that smoke should begin yearly chest X-rays and blood work.

“If we do preventative testing before the 40s we can prevent a lot of these health problems,” Rogers said. “A lot of times it’s too late after the 40s.”

As far as diet, Koslo said 40-year-olds need to focus on nutrient-dense choices, meaning the food has more nutrients for fewer calories. For example, choose whole wheat bread pasta and rice.

Strength training two to three days a week along with cardiovascular activity three to five days a week is recommended to increase bone density and boost metabolism.

“Water also becomes more important as we age because our thirst sensation starts to decline,” Koslo said.

After age 40, the kidneys do not conserve as much water as the body dehydrates, and specific nerves in the mouth and throat that tell the brain to drink do not work as intensely. Pay more attention to drinking water throughout the day and every 15 minutes during activity.

## **50s: The decade of consistency**

The average age for menopause in women is 51, meaning women can lose up to 90 percent of estrogen and up to 5 percent of bone density annually immediately following menopause, putting women in their 50s at risk for osteoporosis.

But Rogers said men should not be completely ruled out of the menopause crisis. Male menopause has been recognized as a medical issue since 1995 and is especially common in men with a record of heavy steroid use, Rogers said.

Being consistent and incorporating strength training two to three days a week along with cardiovascular training three to five days a week is imperative to bone health in this decade, although Koslo admits intensity will drop a small amount with age.

“When women lose estrogen, fat begins to form around the middle and increases the risk for heart disease,” Koslo said. “Focus on a heart-healthy diet. The older we get the more things naturally happen, such as blood pressure rising.”

Koslo recommends increasing omega-3 fatty acids, fruit, vegetable and fiber intake.

“I say fiber because our digestive system slows down as we get older,” Koslo said. “Physical activity can prevent it a little bit, but insoluble fiber will help with the colon and soluble fiber will help with the heart.”

Additionally, vitamin B12 supplementation will help the absorption of nutrients in the stomach, Koslo said.

Rogers recommends yearly physical exams, blood work to check cholesterol, hypertension and prostate issues, as well as electrocardiograms.

## **60s and beyond: The decade of responsibility**

Between ages 30 and 80 men lose an average of two inches of height and 20 percent of bone mass, and women three inches of height and 40 percent of bone mass.

Taking responsibility for strength training is crucial in preventing fall risk at this age.

“As we get older we can’t be as intense, but if you stay active you can continue to exercise at your capacity,” Koslo said. “Continue to use your large muscle groups by hiking or running or, as we get older, maybe swimming or biking. Physical activity also increases blood flow to the brain, which can have positive mental effects.”

Rogers recommends people in their 60s and older just beginning to exercise should start out slow and work up.

“The No. 1 exercise recommended by the American Heart Association is brisk walking,” Rogers said. “It’s very simple and easy to do. Cardio exercise promotes health and slows down the aging process - it’s never too late.”

Rogers also said that people in this decade need yearly blood work, physical exams and electrocardiograms.

The elderly should remember to drink water even when they are not thirsty, as the nerves in the mouth and throat that tell the brain to drink lose intensity with age, Koslo said.

Additionally, focus on a heart-healthy diet, incorporating nutrient dense foods, fiber, calcium, vitamin D, iron and vitamin B12.

## HEALTHY LIVING 2008 -- 30s profile: Dawn Franklin



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### **Dawn Franklin**

#### **What is the biggest challenge of staying healthy at your age?**

“Just as you’re getting older you have to always eat right and keep moving. You start to lose muscle... well, it’s easier to lose it and, with me, I notice if I take too much time off I start to get out of shape quicker. Once you turn 30, a lot of things start to change.”

#### **What is your biggest accomplishment?**

“With hard work and determination I went from a size 13/14, 170 pounds and feeling very unhealthy down to, over a span of time, 140 pounds, a size 6 and feeling good about myself, so good I wanted to help other women reach similar goals and became a trainer.”

#### **What are your goals?**

“My next goal is to do a marathon.”

#### **What is your motivation to stay healthy and active?**

“My father is my motivation. He’s 71 and has always worked out. He taught me to treat your body like a temple. He says he feels 20 or 30 years younger than he is.”

#### **Do you have any heroes?**

“My father.”