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Fit Rx

Baby boomers are a large part of fitness population

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By: Linda Stollings | Special to the Herald Courier
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BRISTOL, Va. -- Recent studies show people over 50 are the fastest growing segment of the fitness population. That might not mean much to you unless you know the following statistics. During the period of 1946-1964, 76 million babies were born in the United States. That is nearly one third of the country's entire population. Two thirds of all the people who have ever lived past the age of 50 in the entire history of the world are alive today. In the next 30 years the 50 plus age segment will grow by 74 percent. Wow, that is a lot of people and people that are interested in staying well. You bet your boots that fitness centers, health clubs, trainers and coaches know this statistic and if they are smart they are marketing wellness to the boomers. I fall into this age group and am proud to be part of a generation that is seeking wellness. We will of course grow old, but we will do it as actively as possible.



Credit: Special to the Herald Courier

Linda Stollings's column Fit Rx appears each Wednesday in the Flavor section in the Bristol Herald Courier.

Colin Miner, CEO of the International Council on Active Aging and fitness industry veteran, gives these tips to keep your body and brain fit and well as you age.

» **The recommendation used to be** that if you were older than 50 and starting a workout out program, you should see the doctor for a checkup before starting a regime. Now, unless you have a health issue that would require medical clearance like high blood pressure or heart disease, the recommendation is to just start moving.

» **The biggest challenge** boomers have in getting fit is motivation. Energy is one of the reasons why older people don't exercise. But in reality it gives us energy. It a catch 22: 69 percent of adults over the age of 50 exercises to gain energy, but the lack of energy is one of the top 20 reasons why older people don't exercise. To help combat a lack of energy, look at your diet and work schedule. Check to see if any of your prescriptions have fatigue as a side effect. You have to break through that so you can start living a more vibrant energetic lifestyle.

» **Studies show that if you are active** in your senior years you could live longer and improve mental health as well as physical health. Physical activity, whether it is gardening, walking or running, can help prevent depression and cognitive issues.

» **If you are taking a walk**, connect with yourself and all of your surroundings. Anything that can engage the mind so that it is taken somewhere and helps you connect with yourself is beneficial.

Research does show that moderate intensity exercise can indeed improve brain function. According to author

and Harvard psychiatry professor Dr. John Ratey, another influence on the way the brain works is brain-derived neurotrophic factor, or BDNF. This substance boosts brain cell (neuron) growth and strengthens cell-to-cell connections, essentially changing brain structure. It even protects neurons against age-related changes that can lead to cell death and dementia.

According to Ratey, stronger, healthier, better-connected, bigger brain cells equal increased learning capacity. And here's the big discovery — exercise floods the brain with BDNF, providing the infrastructure it needs to absorb information, process, remember and use it.

Maybe the baby boomer generation isn't so crazy after all. I am thankful I am part of this generation. See you in the gym.

Linda Stollings is a personal fitness trainer in Bristol, Tenn. Email her at lstollings@fitprescriptions.com.

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