

Get the Facts: Age & Losing Weight

Myth:

I can't lose weight because of my age/ "oh you are fit because you are young"

Fact:

A statement that I hear often that really frustrates me is when older adults who are overweight or not in the best shape minimize the effort and determination of those who keep themselves physically fit. These people say things like, "Oh you have it so easy, you are still young. Just wait until you are my age." I don't mean to be harsh but this statement is simply using an uncontrollable variable in one's life to justify not taking care of themselves. As far as scientific and physiologic excuses go, this is not one of them.

Here's why:

As we age, our metabolism does indeed decrease in activity. This can be from several reasons (thyroid function, androgen levels, etc.) of which I will not get into. The thing is, no one's metabolism drops to the point where they cannot lose weight or gain muscle. No research to date has been able to directly quantify how much a person's metabolism drops as they age (probably because everyone is so different) but, I speculate that the amount of energy being used per day at rest drops by maybe 100-500 kcals per day. To add some context, that is one half to two Snickers bars or one peanut butter and jelly sandwich. In May of 2008, Sillanpaa conducted a study where 40 year old -65 year old men underwent endurance or strength training 2 times per week (an amount anyone can fit into their busy schedule) and saw a 2.1% decrease in body fat in a few months, as well as significant gains in strength and muscular development.

Another reason it may be harder to stay fit as you age is the rate of muscle protein synthesis, i.e. it is harder to gain muscle as you age. It may be true that it is "harder" but many hear this and are deterred altogether. Another study by Bickel et al. in 2010 showed that with 3 days per week of resistance training, older men gain significant amounts of muscle as compared to their younger counterparts who gain the same with 2 days of training per week. Also, with ½ the intensity (1.5 days per week of training), the older men could maintain the muscle gains. Although the younger men could maintain the muscle mass at a lower frequency (only 1 day per week of training), it was not nearly as much of a difference as some may say.

Finally, I have heard that protein supplements will make older people fat rather than strong. Protein powder is food like anything else, and used inappropriately (like anything else) can cause you to gain fat. However, according to Yang et al. in 2012, older men actually required more protein to aid in muscle growth than younger men and muscle growth was as effective in both.

Get the Facts Continued



Conclusion:

Aging sucks, but it doesn't mean your body falls apart and is useless. What will cause your body to fall apart and become useless (like with any machine) is poor maintenance. It is never too late to start changing the way you look and feel. If you are over the age of 40, you may have to cut out one extra sandwich a day, go to the gym one extra time per day, or add an extra protein shake into your diet, but I hardly think any of those compromises are impossible. For some extra motivation, here is a woman who works at my gym.....she is 48 years old.



Ernie Shepherd...80-year-old bodybuilder

References:

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