

Retirement

Starting is key to exercise

By Patricia Zapor
Catholic News Service

Motivation to exercise, a problem for people of all ages and physical conditions, can be especially challenging for the elderly.

Even for people who have never particularly exerted themselves, doctors say beginning a workout regimen can slow the aging process, improve longevity and ease the symptoms of arthritis and other ailments.

The Center for Science and the Public Interest notes that beginning exercise even after the age of 60 or 70 can increase life expectancy by lowering blood pressure, increasing levels of good cholesterol, decreasing the risk of heart disease and slowing the rate of bone loss.

But the first hurdle is to get the elderly to start, said physical therapist Larry J. Nosse, an associate professor at Marquette University in Milwaukee.

"I start with getting people to determine what their personal

goals are," Nosse said. "It might be as simple as being able to walk out of the nursing home to go with the family for Thanksgiving. So I break it into steps, set functional goals for how to reach that point."

People even more confined by symptoms of aging may set goals like having the upper body strength to be able to hold an infant grandchild unassisted, he said.

Dr. John Morley of the St. Louis University Medical School said the biggest exercise benefit on which he focuses is helping prevent falls, a major threat for aging people.

"It can also make diabetes or arthritis easier to control," the geriatrician said. Exercise won't make either go away, but it can keep a Type II diabetic from needing insulin and tend to allow arthritic joints to hurt less, he added.

"As we get older, we all start to face our morbidity," Morley said. "Moderate exercise is likely to keep someone going more than anything else they can do."

He recommended exercising

with groups as most beneficial, as "the reality is, we are all more likely to exercise with friends."

Senior centers and other community centers are places seniors who are living on their own can start. Morley recommended that seniors consider swimming, "which is a less stressful way for many people to exercise."

In the 40 to 50 group presentations Nosse gives each year, he concentrates on persuading his audience to commit to doing something to improve their strength.

"Even talking about good posture, I can get 100 people to improve the way they're sitting or show them how to increase their motion," he said. "That can help."

"People have to acquire the frame of mind that exercise is good for the elderly," Nosse said. "One-quarter to one-third of the strength loss the elderly have is from disuse. I can almost guarantee if someone will work on it, they can get a 25 to 30 percent increase of strength."



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Motivation is key for a good start in any exercise program. Exercise can increase life expectancy by lowering blood pressure and decreasing the risk of heart disease.

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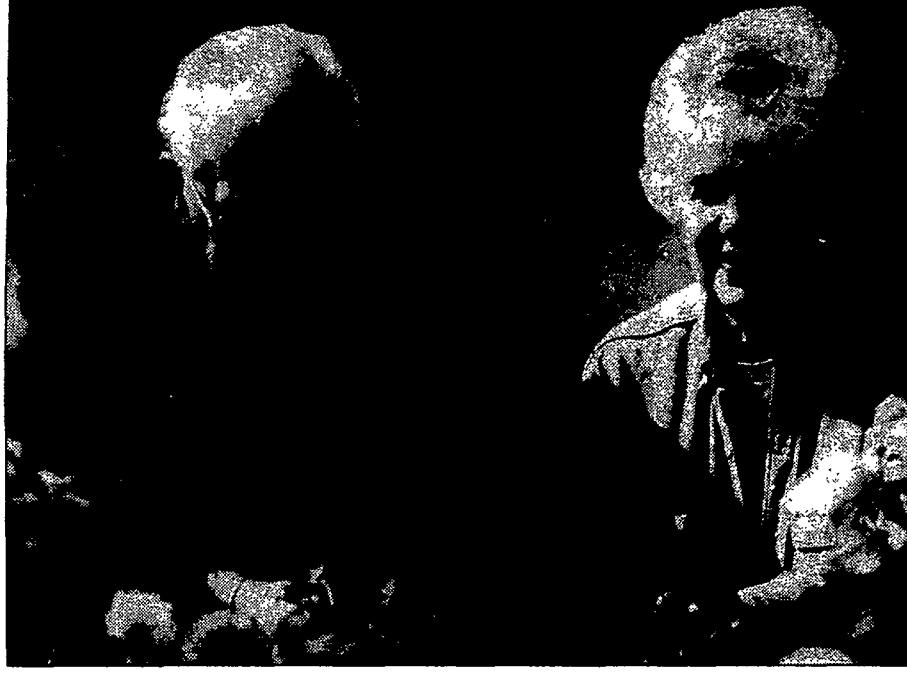
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