



Advice for Aging Joints

As we age, what are the appropriate expectations of our muscle and joint function and what kinds of adjustments to our exercise routines are needed to avoid injuries? Also, how do we increase the longevity of our joints, and delay or even prevent the need for injection treatments or surgery?

As you guessed, older ligaments, tendons and muscles are more likely to tear than to stretch under strain. In addition, there is reduced ability of these soft tissue structures to heal as one ages. Microscopic tissue analyses of tendons and ligaments show increased cross-linking of collagen fibers, and the accumulation of age-related waste material in these structures. These processes lead to a reduction in the elastic property of the tendons and ligaments, leading to a propensity for tears rather than the more appropriate response of stretching under strain. Another unfortunate change in aging ligaments, joints and tendons is reduced cellularity (reduced support, regenerative and even stem cells) in these structures, leading to reduced regenerative potential after injuries.

Older joints also produce less lubricating synovial fluid, which leads to more risk for joint pain and even cartilage injury with overuse of the joints. The chondrocyte population (the support cells imbedded in our cartilage) declines with age, leading to reduced ability to maintain cartilage health.

Prior to 1999, stretching before and after exercise was recommended nearly universally as a way to reduce injuries. However, in 1999 a more rigorous medical study showed at best inconsistent benefits from stretching. The traditional static stretching (holding a position for 15 to 30 seconds) may help to reduce soreness after exercise but did not reduce the overall risk of injuries or help with performance. Dynamic stretching (taking the muscles and joints through a wide range of motion with movement) and flexibility training do seem to help increase range of motion, reduce stiffness and even enhance muscular performance. But studies using dynamic stretching techniques still did not show consistent reductions in joint injury risk.

While stretching probably does not lead to harm, perhaps some of the time spent stretching may be better used on physical therapy, and training on body awareness and injury protection techniques. Physical therapy sessions for persistent joint symptoms is an excellent idea and has proven benefits for speed of recovery and the ability to regain strength and range of motion. But for most, the quality of the physical therapy is highly dependent on the relationship that one develops with the physical therapist, with better results coming from therapists who are high attentive and give individualized plans to learn the proper body mechanics and the proper use of joints during one's preferred activities.

A well-trained physical therapist can also teach body awareness (the ability to sense joint position, movement and muscle tension at the moment) as an everyday tool for injury prevention. Sensing that a tendon, ligament or muscle is being overly strained and then being able to quickly react to mitigate the damage can play a crucial role in injury prevention.

If you are active in sports that require jumping, pivoting and quick step techniques, then having a trainer skilled in these areas can improve your performance and reduce the risk of injuries. It is also NOT recommended to play through pain. Along the same lines as the concept of having body awareness, please stop playing or exercising if you notice a strain or an overuse injury developing. In reality, only professional athletes may have the need to play through pain.

After an episode of strain or overuse injury, please follow the RICE protocol, which stands for Rest, Ice, Compression, and Elevation. Icing a painful area every 2-4 hours while awake for 2-3 days, can help reduce inflammation and swelling. For symptoms more severe than the usual soreness, or for prolonged pain, please consult your physician to see if bracing/immobilization or even imaging and orthopedic consultation may be needed.

(continued on back)

Learning the threshold of activity at which you start to experience overuse joint pain is very important. Trying to stay under that threshold is recommended to reduce the risk of major or chronic joint or soft tissue injuries. For instance, the threshold may be just one round of golf every 3 to 7 days, depending on your symptoms. For most players after the age of 65, that means not routinely playing golf on consecutive days, to allow the body to rest and heal. For walkers or runners, the total number of miles per week may have to be limited, as determined by the level of soreness and the rate of recovery after these walks and runs.

Of course, before embarking on a new stretching, exercise or physical therapy regimen, please consult your personal physician to get individualized advice. Stay safe and please have fun playing those sports that you enjoy responsibly. For nagging pains that limit your function in sports and everyday life, please consult your physician about the best course of action.

Administrative Updates

Please welcome our newest physicians - **Dr. Christopher Short, MD** and **Dr. Katie Mastrogiovanni, MD** both located at our Plano office. Both Dr. Short and Dr. Mastrogiovanni are accepting new patients. Patients may find a list of all Preferred Health Partner physicians accepting new patients by visiting ntphp.com/accepting-new-patients

Our Park Cities office is excited to announce that they will be moving to a new office this fall. Their new office will still be in Preston Center and be located at 8222 Douglas Ave Suite 600, Dallas TX 75225. Contact information including phone number will remain the same.

Healthy Habits:

Blackened Shrimp Tacos with Caesar Slaw

Adapted from: Alex Snodgrass

Ingredients

For the Blackened Shrimp:

- 1 lb peeled, deveined and tail-off shrimp,
- Blackened Seasoning
 - (1 tsp kosher salt, ½ tsp black pepper, 1 tsp paprika, ½ tsp dried thyme, ½ tsp dried oregano, ¼ tsp cayenne), 3 tsp avocado oil, divided

For Serving:

- 8 warm grain-free tortillas (I use Siete Foods almond flour), ½ cup shredded parmesan cheese (omit for dairy-free)

For the Caesar Slaw:

- 4 cups thinly sliced romaine lettuce,
- ½ cup finely shredded red cabbage,
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lime juice,
- ½ cup SideDish Miso Caesar (found at Central Market or Online),
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt,
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, plus more for serving

Directions

- Pat the shrimp dry and place in a large bowl.
- Add blackened seasoning, and 1 tbs of avocado oil and toss until evenly coated.
- Heat the remaining 2 tbs of oil over medium high in a large non-stick skillet. When hot, add the shrimp in a single layer and cook until cooked through ~3 to 4 minutes per side. Remove from the heat.
- In a large bowl, combine the lettuce, cabbage, lime juice, SideDish Miso Caesar, salt, and pepper and toss until well coated.
- Fill the warm tortillas with the blackened shrimp and top with the Caesar Slaw.
- Finish with a sprinkle of parmesan cheese (if using) and some freshly cracked black pepper. Enjoy!



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