

BABY BOOMERS' BODIES IMPACTED BY YEARS OF WEAR AND TEAR

Common overuse injuries result in a variety of conditions

INDIANAPOLIS – As increasing numbers of baby boomer exercise enthusiasts and athletes age, healthcare professionals are treating more overuse injuries, as well as dealing with the results of traumatic injuries experienced by people when they were younger. The [American College of Sports Medicine](#) (ACSM) convened a symposium on *Overuse Injuries in the Baby Boomer, the Results of Years of Abuse* today at its 55th Annual Meeting.

Symposium chair Jeffrey A. Ross, DPM, M.D., FACSM, explained that when acute injuries, such as broken bones, ruptured tendons and ligaments, torn rotator cuffs, ankle sprains, and knee injuries are suffered at a young age, the injury may lead to osteoarthritis or biomechanical problems that can impact how a person moves later in life.

Overuse injuries, which are becoming more commonly diagnosed in middle-aged and older athletes, can lead to foot, knee, hip, shoulder and back pain, which can mean decreases in physical activity.

A foot and ankle podiatrist and associate clinical professor, Ross explains that some of the common foot conditions he sees in older athletes are chronic plantar fasciitis, an inflammatory condition caused by excessive wear to the connective tissue which supports the arch of the foot; insertional Achilles tendonitis, a condition that results in pain at the back of the foot; and hallux rigidus (jamming of the big toe), which can result in arthritic-like conditions.

In addition to ankle- and foot-related problems, aging athletes are also experiencing an increasing number of problems related to their knees, hips, shoulders, and backs as a result of overuse. Medical and surgical treatments to treat pain and help restore movement and flexibility include arthroscopy, joint replacement, joint lubricants (viscosupplementation), cortisone (steroid) injections, and ligament and tendon repair with advanced tissue anchors.

Ross suggests that as people age – especially if they have been avid participants in physical activities such as running, tennis, volleyball, step/bench aerobics, and basketball – they need to consider alternative activities that put less stress on joints, and thus have the potential to result in fewer injuries. He suggests walking, water jogging, use of elliptical machines, and swimming. In addition, Ross is a strong advocate of stretching to help create or restore flexibility.

“The tightness in muscle groups results in lack of flexibility and a limited range of motion,” he says. “This is why activities like yoga and Pilates are so important, especially for an aging population.”

Osteoporosis, another major concern for aging adults, impacts more than 10 million Americans. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, half of all women older than 50 will break a bone because of osteoporosis, and one in four men will, too. Ross recommends getting enough calcium and vitamin D, eating a well-balanced diet, and performing weight-bearing, resistance exercises to help prevent osteoporosis. He also encourages the use of bone density tests, also called densitometry or DEXA scans. This is a diagnostic tool used to determine if a person has osteoporosis or is at risk. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends this test as a routine screening for all women over age 65, and starting at age 60 for those at risk of osteoporosis.

An ACSM [Position Stand](#), “Physical Activity and Bone Health” from 2004 says that rates of osteoporosis are increasing faster than the rate of population aging in the U.S., making bone-strengthening activities especially important.

“It is really important that people continue to be physically active,” Ross said. “But they need to think logically about how to remain active as they age.” Ross does acknowledge that for people who have been very physically active and competitive in sports, it can be difficult to transition to other activities that are less stressful on joints and bones.

He cites his own experience as a marathon runner who has become more active as a tri-athlete. “I am still running. But I am able to cross-train and do swimming and cycling, too.”

The [American College of Sports Medicine](#) is the largest sports medicine and exercise science organization in the world. More than 20,000 international, national, and regional members are dedicated to advancing and integrating scientific research to provide educational and practical applications of exercise science and sports medicine.
