

# Mobility

## A “USE IT OR LOSE IT” PHENOMENON

by Sandra Webber, PhD

Most people don't need to be convinced of the importance of being able to get around. It's vital for independence. It means being out there in the community when and where we choose. It means easy connections to friends and family. Mobility is closely linked to both physical and psychological health.

When mobility is impaired by problems such as arthritis or being overweight, activities become restricted. This results in physical deconditioning – loss of strength, balance, and co-ordination.

**Mobility limitation has been shown to be an early predictor of physical disability, depression, falls, loss of independence, and institutionalization.**

To maintain mobility, it is important to stay active in safe ways. The traditional “use it or lose it” cliché applies. Any form of walking – outdoors, in the hallways, at the mall – is a good idea. Walking builds cardiovascular fitness, muscle endurance, balance, and bone mass. The more we walk, the better we respond to challenges in the environment, such as walking uphill or over uneven ground. That reduces the risk of falls.

Any aerobic activity, such as walking, swimming, dancing, or cycling, helps with weight control and improves the symptoms of arthritis. This kind of exercise strengthens the large muscles in the hips and legs – crucial for things like getting up from a chair and climbing stairs.

For more ideas on keeping fit and mobile, check out Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living for Older Adults, available on the Public Health Agency of Canada website.

### A few more tips on healthy aging:

Have your doctor or pharmacist review your medications regularly. This ensures you are getting the best treatment effects and a minimum of side effects.

If you drive, get your vision checked regularly.

Keep your mind active. Do things that challenge cognition, such as reading, playing chess, card games, crossword puzzles, or crafts.

Try to stay “connected.” Maintain a wide social network. Stay abreast of the transportation options in your community. People who do this have more mobility choices available to them.

