

THE BEST TIME TO Exercise

Let your body – not a clock – be your guide.

SOME PEOPLE SWEAR BY A MORNING WORKOUT TO GET THEIR DAY OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT. Others prefer a walk after dinner. But is one time better than another for maximum effectiveness?

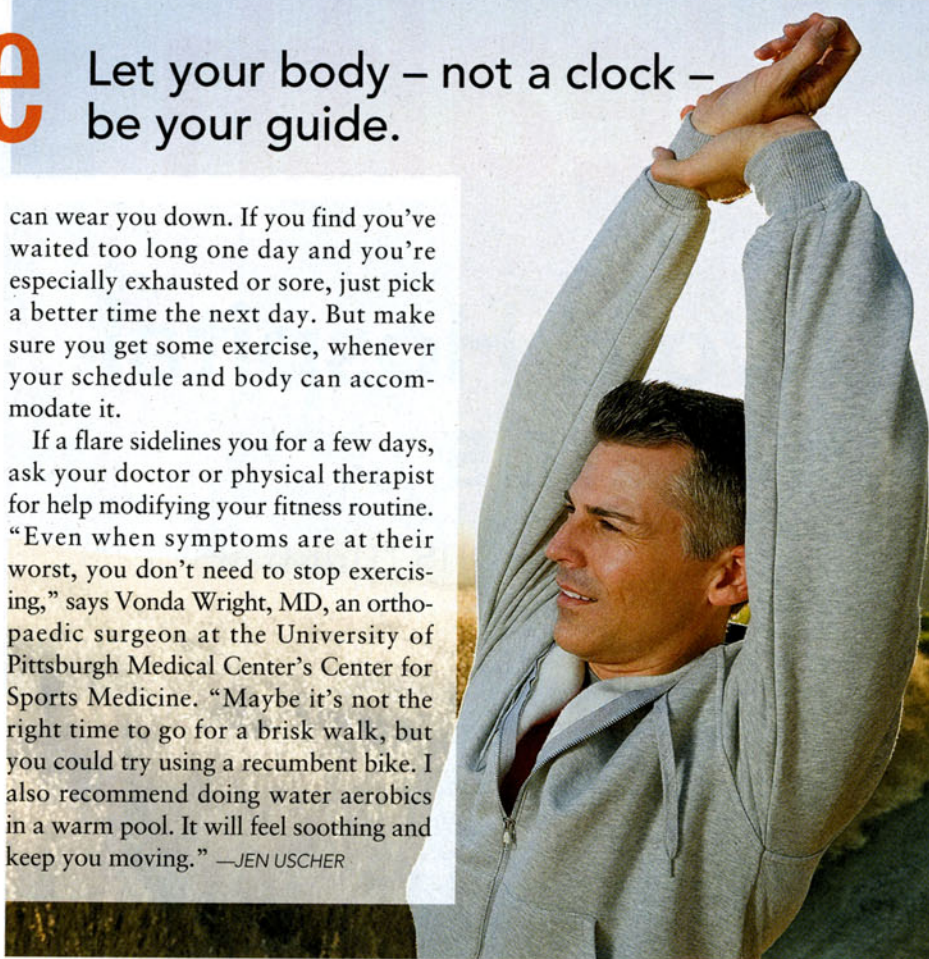
Yes – and what determines the best time for you is how you feel. You'll get much more from your workout, both mentally and physically, if you schedule it during the time of day when you're least tired and sore.

Stiff and achy joints can slow you down first thing in the morning, whether you have rheumatoid arthritis (RA) or osteoarthritis (OA). So if you're going to exercise in the morning, you may want to give yourself some time after waking up – and perhaps a warm shower – to help limber up your joints.

OA pain can get worse through the day with increased activity, and RA

can wear you down. If you find you've waited too long one day and you're especially exhausted or sore, just pick a better time the next day. But make sure you get some exercise, whenever your schedule and body can accommodate it.

If a flare sidelines you for a few days, ask your doctor or physical therapist for help modifying your fitness routine. "Even when symptoms are at their worst, you don't need to stop exercising," says Vonda Wright, MD, an orthopaedic surgeon at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center's Center for Sports Medicine. "Maybe it's not the right time to go for a brisk walk, but you could try using a recumbent bike. I also recommend doing water aerobics in a warm pool. It will feel soothing and keep you moving." —JEN USCHER



A SECRET TO STAYING YOUNG

Regular, vigorous exercise may prevent some signs of aging.

If you're among the people with arthritis who can vigorously exercise – jog, bike or swim, for example – you're in luck. Such activity may help stave off premature aging, according to a study presented at the American Association for Cancer Research 2011 annual meeting.

Researchers at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), found that psychological stress speeds up cellular aging by harming the protective tips of chromosomes, called telomeres – the short-

er the cap, the older the cell.

"We know that shorter telomere length is linked to a broad range of aging-related diseases," says study co-author Jue Lin, PhD, an associate research biochemist at UCSF.

Study participants who reported psychological stress – such as childhood abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder for at least three months, or caring for a family member with dementia – had shorter, damaged telomeres. However, those who had experi-

enced the same types of stress but exercised vigorously for at least 75 minutes per week had less telomere damage.

"Stress accelerates aging," says Connie Weyand, MD, PhD, a professor of medicine at Stanford University in Palo Alto, Calif., who also has published research on telomeres and aging. "Exercise is a way to counteract the aging process. We can influence how fast or how slow we are aging. That's huge." —OTESA

MIDDLETON MILES