

# Seniors Pumped Up About Gym Memberships Go the Extra Mile with Fitness Perks

By Michael Taylor

*One of the best ways to grow old gracefully is to find a routine that's as good for the social life as it is for the body.*

Today's seniors now have access to a variety of fitness programs – at home, at the club or even the mall – that encourage physical fitness and social networking. Research shows that maintaining an active social life is one of the keys to healthy aging, in addition to regular cardiovascular exercise and strength training.

What seniors may not know is that innovative fitness and education programs are now available through their health insurance provider. And in many cases these programs are free of charge, with no copayments, coinsurance or deductibles for Medicare members.

When researching your options for fitness programs, look for a plan that provides membership to a large number of participating fitness clubs, with access to cardiovascular equipment, free weights or resistance training equipment and exercise classes. And don't forget about those other gym perks such as saunas, steam rooms and Jacuzzis, which may be available at some locations.

Other services to look for include:

- Group fitness classes
- Social activity calendar listing events in your community (separate fees may be required)
- Online resources that provide tools and trackers to chart your progress
- Toll-free member service hotline to answer questions about your program
- Healthy aging classes with engaging topics
- Access to online stores with products designed especially for seniors

If hanging out at the gym is not your style, some health insurers offer home-based fitness programs and online classes. Participants may receive walking kits with a pedometer and

walking program instructions or a more intensive exercise kit with exercise DVDs and weights.

Seniors can stay engaged with friends by participating in healthy aging and group fitness classes at the gym and social activities in the community, which are often advertised at the gym and designed especially for their age and interests.

Whether you're lifting weights or enjoying walks through your neighborhood, staying active in the later years has never been easier – or as much fun. ▲

## Stay Fit to Prevent Falls

It's no surprise that our bodies change as we age. Many of those changes, including reduced vision, arthritis and balance disorders, can increase your risk of falling. In fact, more than one-third of adults age 65 or older fall each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Maintaining an active lifestyle through regular exercise and strength training can help improve balance and prevent falls. Work with your doctor to develop an effective exercise program customized to your needs, personal goals and health condition. And consider these additional ideas:

- Programs such as Tai Chi are effective because they focus on balance and muscle strength.
- Light exercise—for example, as little as five minutes of walking four times a week—can be effective.
- Be aware of environmental factors that may contribute to falls. Make sure your home is well lit and free of clutter and throw rugs.
- Wear shoes with a flat, large surface area.

UPMC Health Plan offers a Silver & Fit fitness program for its Medicare members. For more information, visit [upmchealthplan.com](http://upmchealthplan.com).