

## Success Stories

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### 80-year-old a fitness guru

It's fine with George Hinkle that some people teasingly call him "the Billy Graham of fitness." The 80-year-old is the first to acknowledge that he promotes exercise much like a preacher does old-time religion.

"You've got to take your life into your own hands, literally," says Hinkle. "I did just that at age 48 during a physical when my doctor asked how long I wanted to live? I answered: 'I want to outlive my dad.' To which he replied: 'As I recall your dad died at 52 - and right now my MONEY IS ON YOUR DAD.' This was my WAKEUP CALL at 186 pounds, smoking, drinking my share and married to one of the best cooks in the country."

So he quit smoking, cut down on the drinking, and modified his diet, and started to exercise. His fitness program went from walking daily to his first try at running around a high school track. Halfway around, "I thought the world had ended." Still, he kept at it and, at age 57, ran his first of three 26 mile marathons.

Through the following years George endured three cancer surgeries, heart valve replacement, two collapsed lungs accompanied by a staph infection, broken arm with a damaged rotator cup, compressed fracture of two vertebrae, torn ligaments, hip fracture, and most recently a groin injury after a 20 mile run/walk at 81. Through all of these difficult physiological challenges George was told by his doctors how important his physical conditioning was to his swift recovery and rehab time.

George was so taken by a YMCA program for seniors that uses elastic, jump rope length tubing for strength training combined with aerobic workout he started teaching the classes last year. The emphasis in the Y's Young at Heart fitness classes is on balance and stretching. The payoff came in the ability of one woman to get in and out of her hot tub, something she thought she'd never be able to do again. Another payoff is a woman who can once again hold her grandchild.

Too many seniors put down the weights and take up the couch, according to a 1996 Surgeon General's report. It found that 33 percent of men and 50 percent of women age 75 and older do no physical activity.

This was brought home to Hinkle when he was age 71 and he served seniors as an ombudsman for Catholic Charities. "They simply couldn't do anything," he says. "They wasted their bodies." There's no time to waste at Young at Heart. "We have 80-90 year olds that put 60 year olds to shame."

People like George Hinkle! In a takeoff on a famous speech by the late President John Kennedy Jr., he exhorts, "Ask not what your body can do for you, but what you can do for your body."

P.S. And please don't let age stop you from starting NOW. I started over at 48 - 76 - 77 - 79 and now at 81!