

Staying Active After 40: How to Prevent Exercise Injuries

BY DR. BIJANA KADAKIA, ND, SERENITY WELLNESS CLINIC

Staying active in midlife is one of the best things people can do for long-term health. Exercise supports cardiovascular health, metabolism, bone strength, mood, and independence. However, many people notice that injuries seem to happen more easily than they used to, especially when returning to activities they enjoyed years earlier.

One reason is that different tissues in the body adapt at different rates. Muscles often respond relatively quickly to training, but connective tissues such as tendons and ligaments require more time to adjust. These tissues have less blood supply than muscle, meaning they receive fewer nutrients and repair resources. As a result, connective tissue often takes longer to strengthen and longer to recover when injured.



Connective tissue does adapt to exercise, but the process is slower than many people realize. Mechanical loading from activities like resistance training stimulates collagen synthesis, helping tendons and other connective tissues become more resilient

over time. However, this remodeling process occurs over weeks to months, not days. Hormonal changes, reduced muscle mass, changes in sleep, and stress can also influence how the body responds to physical demands in midlife. Suddenly increasing activity after a long break can overwhelm tissues that have not had enough

time to adapt, even if the muscles involved feel capable.

We often remember what we used to do, but our current strength, mobility, and tissue tolerance may not yet match those demands. This is especially common when restarting activity or sports after a long break.

Pickleball is a good example. The sport provides cardiovascular, coordination, and social benefits, but it also involves quick bursts of movement, sudden changes in direction, and repetitive motions that are less common in daily life. Many injuries occur not because the activity itself is harmful, but because people jump into intense play without adequately preparing their bodies.

Preventing injuries often comes down to a few simple, and admittedly less exciting, strategies:

- **Build gradually.** Increase activity slowly rather than making large jumps in intensity, duration, or frequency. The body needs time to build capacity.
- **Strength train consistently.** Strength training helps support joints and reduces stress on connective tissues.
- **Warm up before activity.** A few minutes of purposeful movement prepares muscles, joints, and connective tissue for the demands ahead.
- **Prioritize recovery.** Adequate sleep, protein intake, hydration, and rest days support tissue repair. If an injury does occur, giving the body time to heal is

important because connective tissue injuries often recover more slowly.

Pain management can be helpful during recovery, but reducing discomfort does not always mean the underlying tissue has healed. Anti-inflammatory medications and supplements may have an appropriate role in certain situations, but they should not be used to mask symptoms and continue pushing beyond what an injured tendon or joint can tolerate.

The most effective injury prevention strategies are not always exciting. They are often the basics that are easy to skip when people feel motivated and eager to get moving. However, a few minutes of preparation, consistent strength training, and gradual progression can prevent weeks or months of being sidelined.

The goal of exercise in midlife is not simply to do more. It is to build a body that can continue doing the activities that bring health, enjoyment, and connection for years to come.



Dr. Bijana Kadakia is a naturopathic physician and acupuncturist serving the area since 2008 and practicing in Tigard at 12570 SW 69th Ave, Suite 101. 503-987-3622.