

Add a Skip to Your Step

and quality to your life

Remember when you were young, with boundless energy and an unbridled exuberance for life, skipping wherever you went? Well, it's time to channel that inner child and start skipping again.

Age Well With Athletic Skipping

In order to age well we need to engage in activities that not only improve our health but our physical performance and function. Walking on a regular basis has health benefits such as lowering the risk of heart disease, strokes, high blood pressure, colon cancer and diabetes. Add short bouts of skipping into your walking routine and you will improve your power and ability to move quickly to help prevent falls.

What Happens With Age?

As we age we lose around 1.5% of our strength per year after the age of 50. More alarming, we lose twice that, around 3% of our power or our ability to move quickly every year after the age of 50. It is the loss of power that affects our ability to climb stairs, move quickly to cross a street when needed, the ability to stand up from a chair or to recover from a stumble to prevent falling. Our bodies are made up of both slow twitch muscle fiber and fast twitch muscle fiber. Slow twitch muscle fiber allows us go long distance, such as running marathons. Fast twitch muscle fiber allow us to move quickly, such as a sprinter running 100 meters at full speed.

As we age the ability to lift our forefoot quicker (dorsi-flexion) becomes impaired and therefore we may become more susceptible to stumbling because of that inability. Likewise, the inability to push off (plantar-flex) from our forefoot when walking, or to lift our knees high quickly to recover from a stumble or climb stairs limit our speed of movement.

What Exactly Does Athletic Skipping Do?

From a simple movement done correctly the benefits are impressive.

Athletic skipping is an excellent fast twitch muscle fiber exercise for the lower body. The take off ankle engages in a rapid movement causing the fast twitch muscle fibers to contract so

you propel yourself upward while at the same time the foot stays close to the ground keeping impact low. The high knee movement on the other leg engages in a fast twitch action as well while at the same time producing a greater range of motion thus increasing mobility in that particular movement. The foot that is higher off the ground while the knee is raised high should be in a, "casting" position. This means the forefoot is flexed or in other words the toes are flexed up toward your nose as if your foot is in a cast. The foot should not be pointed down. With that foot in the "casting" or flexed position then we exercise that particular movement or the muscle responsible for that movement to happen. Practicing this "casting" movement encourages the "picking up of the feet" while we walk and helping prevent stumbling which can lead to falling. During the aging process that movement gets weak or ineffective and can cause stumbling or tripping because of the inability to lift our forefoot when walking. Again, this will better train our foot to engage in that position while walking which in turn should reduce stumbling.

Relearning Skipping

This is a simple exercise and short bouts can be added while out walking. For example, if you are out for a thirty minute walk, try skipping only 15 meters at a time for every 5 minutes of walking. Athletic skipping is done without much distance covered. In fact, athletic skipping can be done while in place without any forward movement at all. The focus should be on an erect posture, high knee action and very slow movement forward while the skipping action itself is swift.

While benefiting from the health benefits that walking provides you can now improve your physical performance and function by adding athletic skipping to your walking routine.



Paul Holbrook has his master's degree in Gerontology and is a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist through the National Strength and Conditioning Association. He has over 20 years of experience working with older adults. In 2005, Paul founded Age Performance, Inc., which is a training center for older adults where he develops comprehensive strength and conditioning training programs to improve their physical function and human performance.

HOW TO DO IT

Head should be in a neutral position

Active arm swing with elbows bent at 90 degrees – not with straight arms. The movement should be from the shoulders and not the elbows.

Knees high to where the thigh is parallel to the ground



Posture should be upright and erect.

Think of skipping in place with high knees but slowly moving forward. The movement forward should be 10-15 meters and should take approximately 10-15 seconds to cover that distance.

The ankle that is raised high should be in a flexed position, toes up or as if the ankle was "casting" as in a "cast position."

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