

Surf Flexibility and Conditioning for Slightly Overweight Old Farts

What group of surfers has the hardest time ensuring they stay flexible and are conditioned to surf? It's not younger kids with soft bones and bodies that can take lots of punishment. The group with the serious need is the over 40 crowd with desk jobs that still love surfing, get to surf maybe only a few times each month, and don't want to hurt themselves or anyone else when they do get in the water. We know there are plenty of "kids" that would prefer they just retire and go away. But hey, surfing hooks you for life. Anyone who can still have fun on a board in my age group deserves all they can get.

Advice for Beginners

What advice would you give an older surfer who wants to learn how to surf? Go out and have fun is the best advice so long as you understand your limitations. Don't go out on a day when the surf is too big for your ability, when it's breaking fast in shallow water, or where conditions are overly crowded with experienced surfers. Stay out of other surfer's way and you will have more fun. Remember, if you are inexperienced, you are not going to be able to surf where the waves are breaking the best. Settle for places on the beach with less consistent surf and you will catch more waves.

Why choose surfing as activity over something else? Surfing conditions your entire body, keeps you flexible, and helps you get a great tan. It's a personal sport where you constantly test your own limits and abilities against the ocean. You don't need a partner of equal ability to enjoy yourself. It's also an inexpensive sport after you own your own board and whatever else you need. What other individual sport offers all these advantages.

Flexibility

This section describes the things to do to remain flexible and prevent pain while still being able to stay in the line-up with all the wave hogs. With age come joint stiffness and less muscle tone. Sorry, but by your late 40s to early 50s, nearly everyone will begin to have problems getting out of bed in the morning. Even worse, your back and your lower thighs will hurt after paddling for waves and sitting on a board during longer sessions, plus your arms will start to feel like jelly a lot sooner than they did when you were 15-20 years younger. Is there anything you can do to make your life less miserable?

Although you still surf and workout on a fairly regular basis, many sit at a desk at work all day long. Many in their 50s start surfing longboards again, mostly because they are having a harder time getting any waves in the better surfing breaks they frequent, plus they are missing a lot of waves on smaller days just because they can't get up enough momentum to drop in. Then winter comes around and you need to wear a heavy wetsuit. By then your shoulders and neck really start to get sore from paddling the bigger board while trying to see under the rim on your hood.

Using some muscle stretching techniques developed for older athletes, here are a couple of drills that can help eliminate most of the soreness. These should be quickly and easily performed right on the beach for a few minutes before going out.

Shoulder Pull

This is a quick way to stretch out your shoulders. Lock your hands and pull down behind your head on each shoulder as shown. Three times through on each side, holding the pressure as long as it is comfortable for about 20 seconds each time will loosen your shoulder muscles for easier paddling.



Back and Groin Stretch

This exercise quickly loosens your groin plus helps loosen your lower back muscles. Sit on the floor or sand with your feet together as shown. Each hand should hold a foot at the toes. As you pull the toes toward your body while bending over as far as you can, push your elbows out into your thigh just below your knees. You will feel the stretching as you pull toes and push thighs harder.



Groin Stretch

This exercise is similar to what sprinters do to loosen their calf muscles but with a slight variation to stretch your groin. Place your hand over your foot with the thumb in your instep as shown. As you stretch forward, also push your elbow into your knee. The more you push the elbow out, the more you will feel your groin muscles loosen up. I stretch as far as I can for about 30 seconds on each side.



Neck Flex

This exercise is included simply to show what you can do but not to recommend it until you think your neck muscles are built up enough to handle it. This drill will loosen your neck muscles quickly, keep them in shape, and work on your balance at the same time. It's simply

a variation on a traditional neck bridge, except that all your weight is on your neck, and you have only your balance to keep you from falling over. Also, this drill seems to work for someone with a big belly better than the traditional bridging exercise. Note that you should use a traditional bridge exercise and also roll across your neck and shoulders to stretch first before this full neck drill.

The drill consists of standing on your head, bringing both feet down together slowly first. Then back up and bring one leg down in a split as far as you can. Hold each position for about 5 seconds. Repeat the drill three times. Note that you will do better performing this drill on the beach or with a cushion to pad your head.



Weight-Room Exercises

Probably the best weight room type exercise for older people is a rowing machine. Most surfers develop their share of muscle and back problems after long sessions. However, once you start rowing, your lower back pain will gradually disappear, plus your paddle strength increased drastically. Rowing will also help conditioning.

If your back does start to bother you, there is one weight room exercise that you absolutely must try. A number of professional surfers use it. Find a gym where you can hang from your knees, head down. Take a light weight, maybe 5-10 lbs, hold it behind your head, then arch back up and down for three sets.

There was another exercise that can be used occasionally. The curl exercise on the weight machine builds your grip, something you need to paddle through waves.

Jump Roping

Besides lots of time in the water, spend some time running and jump roping - not much weight training. Running builds endurance. Jump roping builds both endurance and quick responses. You

absolutely need very quick responses if you are going to be able to react to the quick changing conditions of a high performance wave. Jump roping didn't really catch on with world class athletes in all sports until Olympian Buddy Lee came along. He developed a series of drills that have now been incorporated into the majority of Olympic team training programs for all sports.

Roller Skates for Balance

Roller-skating is another "special" training activity. We don't mean using a skateboard, which you should also do if you are comfortable with it, but roller-skating (or even roller blading) will develop balance faster than about anything else. Get yourself a pair of roller blades and use them on a regular basis. If you can't afford blades, then go workout at a roller rink once a week. Serious outdoor roller blading can also take the place of running to build up your conditioning.

Skateboarding for Power

Racing on a skateboard is similar to a giant slalom in skiing, and will help the power aspect of a surfer's individual style. Longer and heavier type skateboards, just like surfboards, are best suited for this type of training. The idea is to shift your balance over longer flowing turns rather than short, jerky movements. By adding speed, you can learn to adjust your balance evenly when you turn. Find a small hill where you can practice on a regular basis when the surf was blown or small.

Dancing

As a last comment, a number of top surfers, both years back and currently do considerable nightclub dancing. Maybe dancing helps surfing or maybe surfing helps dancing. Don't know which but the rhythm must help.