

THE JOURNAL ON **ACTIVE**AGING®

2021, Volume 20, Issue 6

A passion for health

Dr. Kenneth Cooper
lives his mission

Elixir of interdependence

Balancing autonomy with
connection as we age

Altered spaces, workforce changes

What pandemic impacts on
the workplace mean for
mental health & more

*Dr. Kenneth H. Cooper,
MD, MPH, 'Father of Aerobics'*

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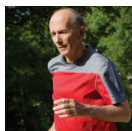
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On the cover: Dr. Kenneth H. Cooper, founder of Cooper Aerobics and fitness movement pioneer, celebrated his 90th birthday in 2021. The active-aging role model perseveres in his global mission to help others live a healthier life at any age. Photo: Hannah Lineros, of Light and Lines Photo Video. Image courtesy of Cooper Aerobics

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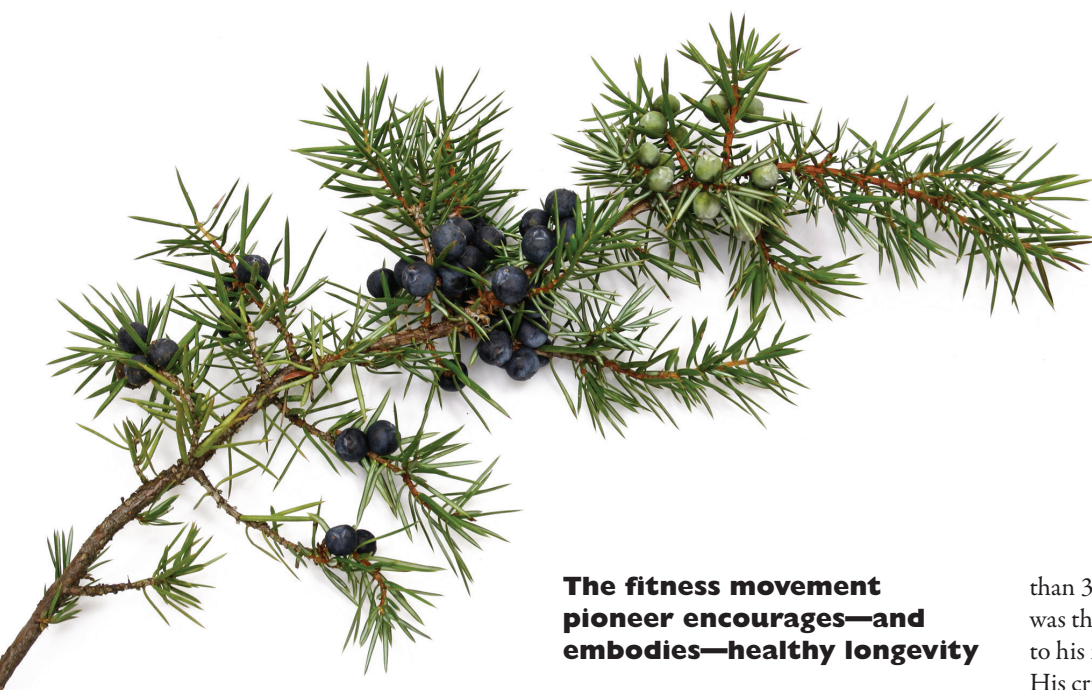
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Dr. Kenneth Cooper

promotes living better
longer



The fitness movement pioneer encourages—and embodies—healthy longevity

by Julie King, MS

How do you go from an overweight 29-year-old to the “Father of Aerobics”? An unexpected epiphany led Kenneth H. Cooper, MD, MPH, to a life-altering change in career course. While water skiing in 1960, he felt like he was having a heart attack. At the hospital, the doctor determined that Dr. Cooper’s heart was healthy, but he was out of shape. He had experienced a temporary irregular heartbeat.

Poor nutrition and inactivity during his medical studies and residency had pushed Cooper’s weight to 204 lbs., a gain of more

than 30 lbs. This physical deconditioning was then compounded by pressures related to his military career and new marriage. His critical wake-up call both humbled and motivated the former high-school basketball All-Star and state track champion, and physician (see page 29 for a brief biography).

Cooper started running the next day and, in 1962, completed his first Boston Marathon. Over the six months following his health scare, he shed 40 lbs. by exercising and following a healthy diet. His prediabetes and hypertension disappeared, replaced by his firsthand knowledge that exercise was a critical—and largely ignored—part of healthcare.

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Dr. Kenneth Cooper, pictured jogging in 2008, has accumulated 80,000+ miles in daily exercise, primarily running and now walking and cycling

Dr. Kenneth Cooper promotes living better longer

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Fitness movement pioneer Dr. Kenneth Cooper educates people about how to live a healthier life at any age, including the benefits of exercise for healthy longevity

“My experience,” Cooper says, “proved how regular exercise could significantly improve your health. I had to share this revelation.”

Cooper has been on a mission to change the health of Americans ever since. Like all pioneers, however, he has had to overcome widespread resistance along the way.

“In medical school in the mid-1950s, we were told that it would be dangerous for our patients to exercise vigorously or competitively after age 40,” Cooper revealed in his 1997 book *Faith-Based Fitness*.¹ If this were true, the fitness movement pioneer—who recently turned 90—would no longer be able to cycle or walk after accumulating more than 80,000 miles in daily exercise over his lifetime. Nor would other

older elite athletes whose training and accomplishments continued past age 40. Examples include long-distance swimmer Diana Nyad and boxer George Foreman, both 72; baseball pitcher Nolan Ryan, 74; and tennis player Billie Jean King, 78.

In the decade Cooper spent as a US Air Force physician and flight surgeon after his early career in the Army, he amassed years of research data from novel treadmill stress testing to identify early signs of coronary disease. He also created the 12-minute and 1.5-mile fitness tests and Aerobics Point System (see the snapshot sidebar on page 29 for details). Cooper wrote his first book, *Aerobics*, in 1968, coining this term for cardiovascular activity. Translated into 41 languages and Braille, the bestseller led to a fitness revolution.

In 1970, after resigning from the military, Cooper founded The Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research and Cooper Clinic to explore the relationship between cardiovascular fitness and health and longevity. Only months later, the 40-year-old had to face a doubtful Board of Censors at Dallas County Medical Society due to what it perceived to be his practice of unsafe stress testing.

“Skeptics said people would drop dead in the street from jogging,” Cooper recalls. “They thought exercise was dangerous. I was going against the grain all the way, and I had to overcome a lot of obstacles.”

Building the foundation for a movement

Recognizing the need for irrefutable research on how physical activity can help

prevent many chronic diseases, Cooper began collecting data in 1970, when he started the Cooper Center Longitudinal Study (CCLS) at The Cooper Institute. The CCLS is now the world's largest and longest running observational study to effectively and repeatedly prove that exercise is medicine.² It has included 116,000 subjects and produced more than 700 papers published in peer-reviewed journals on the impact of exercise on quality of life and longevity.

"We have so much data now that you can't deny that exercise is medicine," Cooper points out. "The results are too impressive to be ignored today. In fact, the most underappreciated risk factor for physical and mental health is lifestyle."

Among some of Cooper's key findings and associated conclusions influenced by his research are:

- Physical inactivity is a significant health problem that contributes to cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, strokes and more. There is an inverse relationship between physical activity and risk of mortality.³
- In a study of 13,600 individuals, improving activity levels slightly—from very poor to poor—decreased risk of mortality from all causes by 58% and increased life expectancy by an average of 6 years.³
- Now at 42% in the US, obesity is the most common manifestation of stress.⁴ Losing just 13% of body weight reduces the likelihood of developing high blood pressure, high cholesterol, osteoarthritis and sleep apnea.⁵
- Common chronic conditions such as cancer, arthritis, asthma, gout, psoriasis, anemia, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, depression and Parkinson's disease are triggered by low-grade, long-term inflammation.⁶
- More than 76% of all lifestyle diseases are preventable; more than 45% of cancers are preventable.⁷

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The Cooper brands

Started in 1970 to explore the relationship between cardiovascular fitness and health and longevity, the Cooper enterprise today includes the following brands:

1. **The Cooper Institute:** A nonprofit dedicated to promoting lifelong health and wellness through research, education and advocacy, The Cooper Institute has helped set public health recommendations for physical activity and has influenced major initiatives in collaboration with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institutes of Health, the Office of the Surgeon General, the American College of Sports Medicine and the American Heart Association.
2. **Cooper Clinic:** Cooper Clinic provides patients with an in-depth picture of their health based on multiple test results, along with an action plan to improve it. It also provides breast health, cardiology, preventive and cosmetic dermatology, 24/7 direct medicine, gastroenterology, imaging and nutrition services.
3. **Cooper Fitness Center:** This 50,000-sq.-ft. fitness center includes a broad range of cardiovascular and strength-training equipment, five studios for group exercise classes and one studio for individual/couples training, two swimming pools, indoor and outdoor tracks, four tennis courts and a basketball court.
4. **Cooper Spa:** To enhance overall wellness, patrons can take advantage of multiple therapeutic, restorative and rejuvenating treatments, such as massage, body scrubs and wraps, and skincare treatments.
5. **Cooper Hotel and Conference Center:** A convenient option for Cooper Clinic patients, Cooper Spa patrons and visitors to the campus, the hotel has 57 rooms, 12 suites, meeting space for up to 250 people, healthy catering options and resort amenities.
6. **Cooper Complete Vitamins:** Developed by a team of physicians and scientists working with Dr. Cooper, the Cooper Complete line of nutritional supplements includes multivitamins, omega-3, vitamins and minerals and custom formulations.
7. **Cooper Wellness Strategies:** This Cooper brand specializes in population health and wellness, helping to build healthier communities throughout the United States, including active aging, medical fitness, corporate fitness, community fitness and commercial fitness centers. Services include project concept development and feasibility analysis, business plan development, leadership and staff training, wellness programming, facility management and more.

Dr. Kenneth Cooper promotes living better longer

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Cooper Aerobics celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2020. Including nonprofit The Cooper Institute and six health and wellness companies, the Cooper enterprise encompasses nearly 500 employees and more than 30 acres in Dallas, Texas

- Being “Cooperized” (see the client handout on page 33) leads to greater longevity—10 years over the national average to age 90.4 for women, and plus 9 years to 86.5 for men.²
- Higher midlife fitness levels are associated with lower incidences of Alzheimer’s disease and dementia.⁸
- Vitamin D deficiency influences the decline of cognitive processes and can lead to dementia and Parkinson’s disease,⁹ as well increased risk of acute respiratory infection, including COVID-19.¹⁰

Without the foundational research, the fitness movement may not have taken its first step forward. Yet Cooper had a passionate vision for change.

Today, the Cooper enterprise encompasses nearly 500 employees over 30 acres, and includes seven brands (see the sidebar on page

27). The visionary physician also has sold some 30 million copies of his 19 books worldwide.

Sharing messages and recommendations

What can active-aging professionals learn from the messages and research findings Cooper has shared over the years? As a start, let’s help our members and residents to understand they are capable of more.

“Remember, your physical potential as you age is greater than you have been led to believe,”¹ Cooper says in *Faith-Based Fitness*. “By pursuing an intelligent physical conditioning program, committing yourself to sound nutritional habits and enhancing your general health through such disciplines as a regular medical exam, you can postpone the aging process and maximize your physical potential.”

We’ve all heard it before: The basics, such as being fit, build the foundation for better long-term health. As Cooper says, “If you can reach a good level of fitness at age 50, it can have a dramatic impact on what happens to you at 70.”

Cooper not only stresses the impact of prevention on how we age, but also what a healthy lifestyle involves. Below are some recommendations to share with our participants, along with some *Journal on Active Aging*[®] interjections of suggested “things to ponder”:

1. **Live well.** Longevity is important, but healthspan even more so. Disease or chronic health conditions in the later years deteriorate physical and mental well-being. Lengthening the healthspan, or healthy years, is critical to enhanced quality of life and overall wellness.

“Our healthcare system shouldn’t simply focus on prolonging death,” Cooper observes. “We need to focus more on preventive medicine and promote the importance of exercise to maintaining health as we age. For many years, I’ve been advocating that it’s more beneficial and cost-effective to prevent disease than it is to find a cure.”

Cooper explains, “We educate and motivate people by giving them small, realistic goals to make changes, and then safely and effectively progress over time. Remember that fitness is a journey, not a destination.”

Things to ponder: What are you doing to help your members or residents *change their behaviors* to live well and to expand their healthspan? How are you educating them on the importance of building the foundation for better longer life?

2. Take responsibility for your health.

It’s imperative that people own their personal choices regarding lifestyle and forego blame shifting, victim thinking and relying on doctors to make them healthy. “Your health is your responsibility,” Cooper contends.

Things to ponder: As a wellness model should focus on individual autonomy, how do you ensure your members or residents are at the center of their (and your) health and wellness model? Consider language, for example. Is your language, both written and spoken, empowering your residents and members? One option is to take stock of your communication as an organization and in each department. You might bring together a small group to discuss what you say, how you say it and what you intend to convey.

3. Muscle strength matters.

“You actually can grow *healthier* as you age,” Cooper points out. “It doesn’t automatically have

Kenneth H. Cooper, MD, MPH: A snapshot



While serving in the US Air Force, Dr. Kenneth Cooper (far right) amassed years of research data from novel stress testing

Dr. Kenneth Cooper is the founder and chairman of Cooper Aerobics in Dallas, Texas, which marked its 50-year anniversary in 2020. On March 4, 2021, the fitness movement leader celebrated his 90th birthday. He has no plans to retire anytime soon, he says, as he’s busy promoting and proving to the world the benefits of exercise for maintaining health.

Awarded a track scholarship to the University of Oklahoma, in Norman, Cooper earned his bachelor of science and doctor of medicine degrees there. Later, he graduated from Harvard University’s School of Public Health with a master of public health degree, and was certified by the American Board of Preventive Medicine.

In 1957, Cooper began his 13-year career as a military physician and flight surgeon—first in the US Army and later in the US Air Force—where

he developed a training program for NASA astronauts to maintain physical conditioning in-flight. He also created the 12-minute and 1.5-mile fitness tests and the Aerobics Point System used today by military organizations, professional athletic teams, law enforcement agencies, public schools and universities worldwide.

Cooper wrote his first book, *Aerobics*, in 1968. Then, after resigning his commission, he launched the Cooper Clinic, The Cooper Institute and the Cooper Center Longitudinal Study in 1970. Today, the study is among the most highly referenced databases on physical fitness and health.

Indefatigable in disseminating his research-backed recommendations, Cooper perseveres in his global mission to help others live a healthier life at any age. “No drug can replicate the benefits of an active lifestyle,” he says.

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Dr. Kenneth Cooper promotes living better longer

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Resources

Internet

Cooper Aerobics

www.cooperaerobics.com

Aerobics

www.cooperaerobics.com/About/Our-Story/Aerobics.aspx;

8 Healthy Steps to Get Cooperized™

www.cooperaerobics.com/Health-Tips/8-Healthy-Steps.aspx

Health Tips (including The

Cooperized e-newsletter)

www.cooperaerobics.com/Health-Tips.aspx

Cooper Fitness Center

www.cooperfitnesscenter.com

The Cooper Institute

www.cooperinstitute.org

Cooper Wellness Strategies

www.cooperaerobics.com/Cooper-Wellness-Strategies.aspx

Print

Cooper, K. H. (1968). *Aerobics*. New York, NY: Bantam Books

Cooper, K. H. (1997). *Faith-Based Fitness*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers

to be the reverse, as is so commonly assumed.” Many aspects are important to being healthier longer, including muscle strength. Muscle strength matters because without it, we are challenged to rise from a chair, to walk, to remain stable on our feet, and to do many of the things we aspire to. Yet, even today, we lack a common understanding at organizational and individual levels of how vital muscle strength is to healthy active aging.

“Over the years, I used to think that aerobic training was all you needed to do,” states Cooper, “but I realized as I grew older that you need to bring in some muscular strengthening as well. After 50 years of age, you start losing muscle mass. My specific aerobic-strength training ratios that I recommend in all my books are:

- *40 years old or younger*: 80% aerobic exercise; 20% strength training
- *41–50 years old*: 70% aerobic exercise; 30% strength training
- *51–60 years old*: 60% aerobic exercise; 40% strength training
- *60+ years old*: 55% aerobic exercise; 45% strength training”

Research has proven that high-resistance weight training leads to gains in muscle strength and size in adults ages 60–96 years old.¹¹

Things to ponder: Are you challenging your beliefs and those of your residents or members about strength and power training, so they can progress with high- and low-intensity training, as appropriate? Or are you underestimating their capacity for change and improvement? If so, consider that unintended results may include your holding people back from living the life they could be living.

4. **The skinny on fat.** Body fat and weight are confusing topics to many people. Which foods help preserve health? What is the diet of the day? What affects body fat and weight? As Cooper

pointed out in *Faith-Based Fitness*,¹ while body fat and weight tend to rise with age, this is not a physiologic imperative, but rather an adaptive change due to decreased physical activity and excess calorie intake. Cooper’s research demonstrates that men and women can maintain their body fat as they age through consistent cardiovascular exercise, a regular strength-training program and calorie restriction when necessary.²

Things to ponder: Unless you are a dietician or nutritionist, it’s important to stay within your scope of practice. Use research to support what exercise can and can’t accomplish, plus authoritative sources for any general educational materials about nutrition. Why not explore how you might better enhance your services by integrating a dietician or nutritionist into your efforts? How you might ensure what you say matches their recommendations and the facts? And what issues your residents or members face that will impact their desired outcomes?

5. **Be a health advocate.** As someone working day in, day out with your residents and members, you are more likely to identify health and wellness changes long before they become an issue—whether these are losses of strength or cardiovascular capacity, cognitive abilities, appetite, sleep or weight, or increases in anger, questions or absence from events or classes. Be your participants’ advocate and encourage them to check things out before they show more severe symptoms. Encourage them to participate in ongoing recommended screenings, such as colonoscopies, mammograms and bone density tests as proactive preventive steps. The goal is to prevent disease or catch it early enough to optimize treatment and outcomes.

Things to ponder: How do you advocate for the health and wellness of your residents or members? What can do as an individual and as an organization to

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Dr. Kenneth Cooper promotes living better longer

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A man of faith, Dr. Kenneth Cooper is seen here at the Billy Graham Crusade in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

expand your advocacy efforts as well as make them more effective?


By sharing Cooper's practical recommendations, we can support residents and members in their efforts to preserve health and wellness, enhance quality of life and lengthen healthspan. (A client handout on page 33 features his eight smart practices for healthy living.)

A legacy of changing lives

To advocate for health and individual responsibility, Cooper is releasing a self-funded documentary, *The Power of Prevention*, in early 2022. This documentary project shares the proven benefits of exercise to quality and quantity of exercise, which he hopes will ultimately change the way medicine is practiced.

"In medical school, I was taught that you can't make a living simply treating healthy people in preventive medicine because there was no profit in that," Cooper says. "We definitely have a long way to go in preventive medicine."

This comment is reflected as well in many industries that are connected to or part of healthcare. But with his legacy of changing lives, advocacy of healthy lifestyles and mod-

eling of active aging, Cooper shows us that it's possible to make a difference while making a living in helping others live well. 

Julie King, MS, has been a certified group exercise instructor and personal trainer for more than 25 years. She holds multiple certifications and a master's degree in science (kinesiology). Over her career, King has led virtually every class format—including indoor cycling, mat pilates, yoga, kickboxing, boot camp and aquatics—at commercial health clubs, corporate fitness centers, wellness centers, schools and online. She also has served as a fitness director, fitness/wellness coordinator, health club manager and a contributing editor for Club Business International magazine. King has been published in Club Industry, Club Solutions, Campus Recreation, National Fitness Trade Journal, Recreation Management and Fitness Management. She can be reached at julie.king1@comcast.net.

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Images courtesy of Cooper Aerobics

How to 'Get Cooperized™' for healthy aging

by Julie King, MS

Dr. Kenneth H. Cooper, known as the “Father of Aerobics,” coined the phrase, *Get Cooperized™*, to capture 8 vital guidelines that foster a well-rounded, healthy life, based on his research. He teaches these principles to everyone as a simple way to pursue optimum health.

Maintain a healthy weight. Maintaining a healthy weight is one of the most important aspects to prevent illness and disease, enjoy a higher quality of life and live longer. Knowing your body mass index (BMI), which is an easy calculation, is one simple way to determine if you're at a healthy weight. [Ed. To calculate your BMI online, go to www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/adult_bmi/english_bmi_calculator/bmi_calculator.html.]

Make healthy food choices most of the time. It's about moderation, not deprivation. Aim to eat healthy foods 80% of the time and have a treat the other 20%. Focus on consuming 5–9 servings of fruits and vegetables daily to lower your blood pressure and cholesterol, and reduce your risk of stroke, heart failure, osteoporosis and kidney stones.

Exercise most days of the week. Participate in moderate physical activity a collective 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week, for 150 minutes per week. This can be 30 minutes all at once or broken into smaller segments. Moderate intensity should elevate your heart rate to where you can talk, but you feel winded. This is the magic number to reap the benefits of heart health, prevent diabetes, cancer and other diseases, and improve quality and quantity of life

Take the right supplements for you. Start with a good, balanced diet, and then consider supplements as your insurance policy. Take a quality multivitamin, and have your blood levels checked to determine if you are deficient in any nutrients and need additional supplementation. Research shows most people do not consume enough vitamin D.

Do not use tobacco. All tobacco products, not just cigarettes, can threaten health, and are the number one treatable cause of cardiovascular disease. Tobacco also is associated with multiple types of cancers, including esophageal, cervical, stomach, kidney, pancreatic and more. It's never too late to quit using tobacco.

Control alcohol consumption. If you don't drink, don't start. But if you do enjoy alcohol, practice moderation. Men and women should have no more than one drink per day, which is a 12-oz. beer, 5-oz. glass of wine or 1.5 oz. of liquor.

Manage your stress. Stress can raise blood pressure and resting heart rate and lead to weight gain—all of which can cause cardiovascular disease. Physical activity, meditation, massage, prayer and hobbies are effective ways to reduce stress.

Get regular, comprehensive physical exams. Dr. Cooper has long advocated that it's easier to maintain good health than to regain it once it's lost. That starts with a preventive physical exam, with a baseline between ages 35 and 40, and annual exams recommended at ages 50 and up. Know your cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure, and get checkups each year to monitor changes and aim to prevent diseases before they occur.

Julie King, MS, has been a certified group exercise instructor and personal trainer for more than 25 years. She holds multiple certifications and a master's degree in science (kinesiology). King has created this handout based on Dr. Cooper's Get Cooperized™ challenge. This information appears here with the permission of Cooper Aerobics. For more details about these guidelines and lifestyle advice and practices, see “8 Get Cooperized Steps,” and The Cooperized e-newsletter at www.cooperaerobics.com/Health-Tips.aspx.

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