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Baby Boomers' Bodies Hit by Years of Wear and Tear

by Megan Rauscher

(Reuters) Doctors who specialize in disorders of the skeletal system and associated muscles, joints and ligaments are being kept busy these days, as increasing numbers of baby boomer athletes and exercise enthusiasts hit middle age and beyond.

"We are seeing a number of overuse or 'wear and tear' injuries in the foot, ankle, knees, hip, shoulders and elbows, in baby boomers," Dr. Jeffrey A. Ross, a foot and ankle podiatrist from Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, told Reuters Health. "Baby boomers suffer injuries over a period of time and a lot has to do with biomechanics, poor flexibility, wear and tear, and pounding on hard surfaces" that come with sports like running, tennis, step aerobics and basketball, Ross added.



As people age, Ross believes it's worth considering alternative activities that put less stress on joints. "It is really important that people continue to be physically active, but they need to think logically about how to remain active as they age," he said.

Ross spoke about overuse injuries in baby boomers at the annual meeting of the American College of Sports Medicine underway in Indianapolis. "We need to be rational and logical without hurting ourselves and developing overuse injuries that can really become debilitating as we get older," Ross told Reuters Health.

For example, he suggests aging marathoners cut back on distance and think about cross-training instead. "Probably when you start getting into your 40s and 50s, the half marathon is a great alternative. Or, if you did two or three marathons a year, cut it back to one a year or opt for 10K or 5K runs," Ross said.

A marathon runner himself, Ross fully admits that some marathoners will have a tough time cutting back on their runs. "Having run 25 marathons, it was hard for me to cut back. Psychologically, a lot of runners don't want to hear that and they continue even against the advice of their doctors," Ross said.

Ross is also concerned about the alarming rise in sports-related injuries suffered by children and adolescents who overdo it on the playing field. "Today, injuries occur in kids who do sports like soccer, baseball, and ballet year-round, without taking a break. What happens to them 20 to 30 years later, after suffering an injury as a teenager? It's a concern," Ross said.