

Aging Diver

I am 79 years old and healthy. I have not been diving in several years and would like to get back into it. Are there any recommendations, prohibitions or limitations for a diver my age?

Answer from DAN experts:

The responsibility for the decision of whether or not to dive is generally that of the individual and his or her physician. This decision, however, should be based on the most current diving medical information available. Many people in their 70s and 80s continue to dive, although their diving style may change over time. The key to safe diving is physical fitness, not age. A thorough cardiac workup and stress test are prudent and probably the first priorities. Many cardiologists familiar with dive medicine recommend a cardiac stress test targeting a score of 13 metabolic equivalents (METs), while others recommend a minimum of 10 METs. Either level is rigorous exercise. While most diving is relaxing, a strong current, a long surface swim or rescuing a buddy (or oneself) all require a high level of exercise tolerance. Awareness of underlying medical issues is of practical use. The basic aches of arthritis could be confused with decompression sickness, so conservative profiles are recommended for anyone who deals with this issue. Also, diving in locations with reasonable access to medical care is prudent. Anyone can have a medical or diving emergency, and age makes medical emergencies more likely.