

Can You Learn to Paddleboard at Age 70?

By John Brodman

Standup paddleboarding (also known as SUP) has taken the world by storm in the past few years. It's part of a larger progression from surfboards, to windsurfers, to kiteboards—and now to paddleboards. But what goes around comes around, and it will probably only be a matter of time before someone puts a seat on a paddleboard and calls it “sit-down paddleboarding” (SDP), and then a sail is sure to follow, and we'll be off again. You get the picture.

We see paddleboarders all over the place: in the ocean, in the sound and on freshwater lakes, ponds and rivers. Paddleboarding down a river with the current is becoming a new scenic adventure; some even bring a picnic, and some paddleboarders crazy enough to try it are attempting to run rapids in what is known as whitewater paddleboarding. If it hasn't already been done, it probably won't be long before we hear of someone paddling the entire length of the Erie Canal, the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway, the Mississippi River or the Great Lakes. Daredevils will probably try to ride one over Niagara Falls.

Paddleboard prices have come down, and the technology has improved. Paddleboards are available for almost any kind of conditions likely to be encountered. There are wider, longer, thicker models that offer stability for beginners, and sleek models made for speed. Some are made for surfing and others are made for flat water paddling. They are lighter in weight than they used to be, and easier to carry. There are also new inflatable paddleboards that take up less room, and paddleboards equipped for fishing. So if you want to try it, now is the time to get started.

Can you learn at age 70? The short answer is “yes”; age alone doesn't have that much to do with it. Here are a few easy drills you can run through to gauge your fitness level, and a few tips on getting started.

The Dean Martin test. Dean Martin of Rat Pack fame used to say that he knew he was drunk if he had to hang on when he was lying flat on the floor. This is a good starting place; try it. Can you lie on the floor without hanging on? If you answered “no,” you might want to have another drink and rethink this whole paddleboard thing. If you answered “yes,” proceed. For the next step, determine if you can get up off the floor without holding onto someone or something. If you can, you're good to go. If you can't, consider the reason why.

If you don't have any longstanding biomechanical issues, such as arthritis, you may only need a bit of conditioning. Go to the gym, get out and walk, ride a bike, swim, work on your core and do some squats. You'll be ready in no time. For a simple test of your balance, try standing up, bending over and tying your shoes. If you can do this without getting dizzy, you're good to go.

Getting started. It's probably wise to get started by renting a board or borrowing one from a friend. You will save money if you decide you don't like it. I'm constantly reminded that my house has been littered over the years with rarely used sports equipment. You can also take a lesson from one of many providers here on the island who usually include the use of a paddleboard in the cost of the lesson. The aquarium sponsored classes this summer, and many people here in Pine Knoll Shores took advantage of this great service.

If you're anxious to get started and don't want to wait for the aquarium sessions to start up again, and if you have a friend who has mastered the sport, get him or her to take you out and show you the ropes. Start off on flat water in the sound on a calm day. It takes a few tries, but pretty soon you will learn to relax on the board and have fun. Most people start off by paddling around on their knees to get the feel of the board and find the sweet spot where they will want to stand.

When you are ready to try standing up, make sure you are in at least three feet of water and away from docks, bulkheads, pilings, crab pots and anything else that could cause some damage if you fall (and you will fall).

Above all, remember that paddleboarding isn't supposed to be a contact sport. Cheers.



Q. My son and I saw a lot of dragonflies while fishing at a pond near our home. He asked if dragonflies could hurt you. I'd never thought about it. Are dragonflies harmful to humans?

A. Dragonflies are not harmful unless you're a small insect or fish—then you're a potential meal. Dragonflies can't sting, although that's one of the enduring myths; nor can they sew your ears together, another myth that gave them the nickname “devil's darning needle.”

Dragonflies and damselflies look very much alike and both belong to the order *Odonata*. Dragonflies are larger than damselflies and fly faster, and also hold their wings spread when they alight, unlike the damselfly that folds its wings over its back. Both are ravenous feeders, and the dragonfly nymph is one of the most voracious pond predators. Both like similar environments and dragonfly and damselfly nymphs are important food sources for fish in ponds, swamps and streams.

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Have You Heard . . . ?

Carteret Big Sweep events. A number of events are scheduled for this year's Carteret Big Sweep. Below are some opportunities to join with others who are interested in keeping our area clean for the enjoyment of residents and visitors. Please contact Big Sweep Coordinator Dee Smith at 222-6352 or dee_edwards-smith@ncsu.edu for more information on these events.

- **Emerald Isle Labor Day Cleanup, September 7**
Sponsored by Surfrider Foundation
- **Canoes for a Cause, September 19**
Registration at 8:30 a.m. (bring ID to register), Shepard and 10th Streets, Morehead City. Cleanup 9 a.m.-noon, with an after party at Jack's Waterfront Bar. Please bring your kayaks and canoes; Tow Boat US will transport those without boats to Sugarloaf Island for the cleanup.
- **Discovery Dive Underwater Cleanup, September 19**
Meet at 8:30 a.m. at Radio Island Public Beach Access
Join like-minded beach enthusiasts to clean up the Radio Island Public Beach and underwater area. Free scuba and snorkel rental and free food for participants
- **Fall Carteret Big Sweep Cleanups, October 17**
Organize your group and call Dee Smith at the number above to reserve your location. Every volunteer effort is important and makes a difference.

Tee It Up golf tournament to benefit high school golf teams. Morehead City Country Club will host the seventh annual Tee It Up for High School Golf event on September 20. Started by Morehead City Country Club golf pro Nick Eatmon, the purpose of this tournament is to help fund men's and women's high school golf teams, as golf is a non-revenue-producing sport for the schools. Tournament proceeds go toward scholarships, golf bags, equipment, team attire, travel expenses and awards—and middle school teams have received funds for golf bags and attire as well. This year's event for four-person teams will feature two tee times (9 a.m. and 2 p.m.), dinner and a silent auction. For more information, please call Marty Rueh at 336-264-6093 or Barbara Owens at 646-5447.

Voter registration campaign. From Monday, September 21 through Thursday, September 24, Carteret County citizens will have the opportunity to register to vote and learn about important changes to North Carolina voting law at Carteret Community College (CCC). CCC, the League of Women Voters of Carteret County and the Voter Rights Coalition of Carteret County have formed a partnership to register voters and provide educational materials at the Wayne West and McGee Buildings at CCC from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and at Wayne West from 5 p.m.-6:30 p.m. Monday and Tuesday. There will also be information for voters on the new voting law and what everyone needs to know before going to the polls. For inquiries about this campaign, contact Louise Hughes at 728-7346 or lhughes2@ec.rr.com or Miriam Green at 726-3583 or mwgreen15@gmail.com.