

Spring into Fitness for More Energy!

By Ruth Gordon Howard.

Do you remember when you were a kid and you counted the days until vacation? The days seemed endless as you played outdoors. You came inside to quench your thirst with a big tall glass of lemonade. Time stopped. Vacations lasted forever. Recapture the vacation magic and boost your energy too. Get back outdoors with fitness fun.

Start slowly and gradually increase the intensity of your workout, especially in the heat. Women of any age can enjoy a variety of fitness activities. Just pick an activity you like and one you can commit to doing. In fact, try a few activities and get the benefits of cross-training.

Maybe you like the idea of cycling, horse back riding or swimming. Perhaps a short walk in the morning is enough to satisfy. This spring and summer choose an outdoor activity that you truly enjoy and instead of fighting the heat--celebrate it. It couldn't be easier. Start by following a few simple tips.

- Water--you can't get enough. Remember, your thirst mechanism will not tell you how much to drink. Drink water before, during and after activities. According to the American College of Sports Medicine, drink two cups of water for every pound you lose during exercise. Just think water, and lots of it.
- Early to bed and early to rise can give you a morning workout time that's just right. Early mornings are cooler than late evenings. Sunrise can be an inspirational time for outdoor fitness.
- We've all heard the debate about sunscreen strength. The real issue? Don't leave home without it. Put it on any time you are outdoors and be sure to reapply frequently.
- If you're new to a fitness program, start slowly and even more carefully when it's hot. Fit people have an easier time adjusting to temperature extremes than unfit people. If it feels too hot to workout, it is.

Walking

It couldn't be easier to put one foot in front of the other. Walkers experience very few injuries. It's also the number one weight loss activity and a great way to manage daily stress. Women of all ages can enjoy spring and summer fitness with the most popular American fitness program--walking.

Comfort for your feet is important. You can buy specialized walking shoes or wear a good pair of running shoes. Don't wear any shoes unless they feel great. Comfort and support will keep you on the road to fitness.

If you're new to fitness, start slowly. Walk for 15 minutes and add more time as your stamina increases. The best plan is to work at increasing your duration first and *then* intensity. You can add intensity by increasing speed and hilly terrain. An added benefit when you walk on hilly terrain, you will work muscles you usually just sit on--the gluteals. When you're ready, try a "speed walk." If you speed walk a 12-minute mile, you will get a high-performance, high-intensity workout and burn up to 220 calories in 30 minutes. Whatever speed or distance you choose, have fun and enjoy yourself.

Running

Just like walking, running is simple. You can do it anywhere and the only equipment you need is a good pair of running shoes. Running is not for every woman. Running is more intense and the "pounding" results in greater impact on your joints. Some women also find they have problems with their knees and switch back to walking. But for those who have no problems, running is a great way to get in shape and stay that way.

For beginners, you can start by walking a little and then running a little. You can walk/run every other day no more than four days a week and include a rest day between workouts so your body and joints can recover. Limit your first workouts to 25-30 minutes and give yourself six to eight weeks to build up your stamina. If you stay committed, you will soon feel energized. Remember, in spring and summer, runners have to be careful and avoid running in the midday heat.

Swimming

Splashing water is the sound of summer. How popular is swimming? Well, 27 million American adults swim regularly. That's the number of runners and tennis players combined. The buoyancy of the water makes swimming the best activity if you have joint problems. You can take a special water aerobics class or "water walk" in a pool. You do not need to know how to swim.

If you are a good swimmer, to get started try "interval" training. You can swim the length of the pool and then walk one width of the pool in waist high water. You can keep repeating the sequence depending on your fitness level and alternate how many laps you walk or swim.

Women are generally more buoyant in the water because they have more body fat. Some studies show that swimming may not burn as much body fat as other activities. Although, it's still a great *calorie* burner at approximately 240 calories in 30 minutes. For overall cardiovascular conditioning, swimming can't be beat.

Cycling

Cycling strengthens your heart, lungs and gives your leg muscles a great workout. If jogging or running are not for you, give cycling a try.

If you start riding a bike, make sure you know a few of the road rules. Watch out for people and other living things. Calling out to let someone know you are passing by is a good idea. "Passing on your left" is a time tested phrase. Or you can purchase a bell for your bike, just like when you were a kid. Always wear a bike helmet. If you like long distance cycling, you can also wear padded bike shorts and gloves. Whenever you're riding your bike, beware of traffic.

Riding a bike does put extra stress on your knees. Make sure the seat height is adjusted appropriately which will help. If you enjoyed riding your bike during summer vacations when you were a kid, you can still have fun today.

Horse Back Riding

Growing up, I was passionate about riding horses. My dad finally sent me to summer "horse camp" and I rode to my heart's content. You don't need to go to camp. You can take a mental and physical break by calling a riding stable and getting back in the saddle.

It's a good idea to have lessons if you do not know how to ride. Safety is important. So be sure you know what you're doing. Horses get hot too, so ride early in the morning. You will have sore muscles in unusual places. Who gets a better workout, you or the horse? The horse--but you get some benefits too. Horse back riding does not strengthen your heart and lungs but "riding high" can change your perspective. It will improve your balance, help you relax, reduce your stress level and even strengthen a few leg muscles.

Dress for horse back riding by wearing snug pants and covered shoes. No sneakers, they can slip through the stirrups. There's a reason cowgirls always wear boots. One more thing--prepare to get dusty, sweaty and have lots of fun.

It's up to you. Don't miss this opportunity. Vacation time can seem endless once again. A tall glass of lemonade can be refreshing but first you need to work up a vacation time thirst. Outdoor fitness can be the key to unlock the magic. This season the endless vacation can be yours and give you, a Mothering Mom, endless energy.

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