

Now's the time to get out and get fit!

By Teri Baker

Summertime is a good time to get outdoors and start reaping the benefits of fresh air and exercise. You know – that walking, hiking or biking thing some of your friends do. Whether you enjoy the camaraderie of a group or prefer to be alone with your thoughts, your body will be happier than it was sitting out the gray of winter.

Benefits of regular exercise are too important to ignore. Exercise improves your strength, mobility, flexibility, balance and coordination. It increases bone density, tones muscles and lowers the risk of diabetes, heart disease, obesity, osteoporosis and colon cancer. It strengthens your immune system so your body can better fight disease and improves circulation, digestion and quality of sleep.

Exercise is good for the mind, too, because it produces endorphins that make you feel better and less prone to depression.

So why not get out and enjoy the beauty of nature while you're getting in better shape? (Before beginning any exercise program, be sure to get medical clearance.)

Once your doctor tells you if there are any restrictions, you can get out and get moving. Make sure you wear well-fitting shoes and comfortable clothing and that you warm up and stretch before you begin and cool down at the end.

Here's what area seniors are already doing:

Eunice Mosley has been walking year round on Tuesdays and Thursdays with a group from Mill Creek Senior Center for 15 years. Before that, she and a couple of neighbors used to walk around Silver Lake before going to work. That's three miles. Her Mill Creek group usually does three miles, but now that she's 80, Eunice has cut back to two, although she says she can add the extra mile if she needs to.

"One of the best things you can do is walking," she says. "It's aerobic and you're out in the fresh air. It's nice because we walk rain or shine. It keeps me in shape. We walk at a good pace; no sauntering. When you're walking and talking, it goes by real fast."

Nearly 40 people from the center participate, although not everyone comes each time due to vacations, appointments and other activities. They split up into groups of eight or so and choose one of three routes that take them over paved trails and sidewalks.

"We go to Central Market after we walk, especially when two groups walk different places," Eunice says. The group, which also gets together for breakfast the second Saturday of the month, rounds out the year with a Christmas party. For more information about this group, call 425-948-7170.

If hiking is more your style, you might want to join one of the groups at Lynnwood Senior Center. "We have a big hiking program in the summer," says center program coordinator Janet Sigler, who likes to focus on outdoor recreational activities. "The Tuesday group hikes less than five miles on more gentle ter-



Lynnwood Senior Center hiking group members Mary Schrader, Doris Devine, Beverly Klein and Laurel Bourg take a break while on a hike to Little Mt. Si.

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rain. We call the Wednesday group the Mountain Goats because their hikes are more challenging.”

There’s no such thing as “too old to hike” at the Lynnwood center. She may not be a Mountain Goat, but one woman in her 90s not only hikes, but participates in the Center’s kayaking program and in the winter, goes snowshoeing. The Center also has a biking club and a golf group. For information about the Center’s outdoor recreation programs, call 425-744-6464.

If your favorite senior center doesn’t have an outdoor program, you’re welcome at any center that does. Although not specifically designated for seniors, most local parks and recreation departments offer opportunities for outdoor activities as part of a general philosophy of health and wellness for all ages. Seniors outnumber younger people in many of those programs.

Or, you can ask others to join you in your own walking or hiking program. Besides the opportunity to deepen friendships, there is an accountability factor that will help keep you moving toward better health. Many area parks have walking paths and hiking trails. For example, you can often find seniors walking the wooded trails at Forest Park in Everett. Some walk their local high school track, while others choose a beach walk.

PEDAL POWER

Bicycling is another way to stay on the path to health and wellness. It is low impact on the body and on the environment, a great workout for the cardiovascular system and can be done alone or with a group.

Bill van Horn, 78, rides with the Northshore Senior (Center) Cyclists. A retired teacher and counselor, “I took up cycling 25 years ago, but I didn’t get regular until I joined the group,” Bill says. “I need the exercise. It helps me sleep, helps me feel better, and I enjoy the company.”

Not technically a club – there are no dues or memberships – the group used to call itself the Gourmet Bicycle Club. “We don’t eat that fancy,” Bill says, “but we want to let it be known we take a long lunch. We only changed the name because we thought it was too elitist.”

This group usually gets together on Wednesdays. Riders start about 10 a.m., break for lunch at a restaurant (although riders are free to bring their own food), then ride another hour or two. Most of their rides are along the Burke-Gilman/Sammamish Trail.

The cyclists are ever conscious of safety and trail etiquette. There is always a “sweep,” someone who knows the route and is assigned the last position in case someone gets lost or has a problem with a bike.

Everyone is required to wear a helmet. If you don’t have your own, the group can provide one for \$10. You must carry an inner tube and tools and know how to change a tire. There must be at least one person in the group who can deal with a slipped chain and make other simple repairs.

Bill says most of the group use bikes that cost \$300-\$600 each. “However,” he adds, “we can lend bikes for those who want to get started. That way you can see what you can do and what’s expected before you invest in a bike of your own.”

Northshore Senior Cyclists often go well beyond the weekly trip. There are free daily rides, which often include an event or an interesting destination, throughout the greater Seattle area, as well as a few multi-day rides a year. The group partners with Cascade Bicycle Club and can pick and choose rides of varying length, location and terrain.

Unsure about whether a club is for you? Northshore’s Ed Schramco, who rides a recumbent bike as therapy after an injury, as well as for pleasure, says, “We can help you get back into cycling and accommodate any special needs you may have.”

For further information e-mail NorthshoreSenior-Cyclists@Yahoo.com or call Bill at 206-367-1809, Cliff at 425-487-9677 or Myrna at 206-522-1470.