



Becoming active a vital part of living healthier



How far would you go to improve the quality of your life? Don't go too far, because the first step is right around your house! Today you can improve your health simply by moving your body. Research has shown that there are many benefits to exercise, both physically and mentally. Always check with your doctor before you begin an exercise program.

Why stay active?

- Physically — Small steps to become more active can lead to long term benefits. By being physically active, you can improve your energy, strength, balance, flexibility and circulation. Physical activity can lower your blood pressure, and even help manage your weight. By staying active you'll find that daily activities will become easier, such as carrying groceries or walking for longer periods of time. The Mayo Foundation of Medical Science website states that "exercise reduces a lot of health risks such as dying prematurely, heart disease, and other forms of chronic disease" (mayoclinic.com/)
- Mentally — Exercising your body can calm your mind by helping you to manage stress, improve sleep, improve self esteem, and help you maintain independence. Exercising your mind can be very beneficial. Watching game shows on television to stimulate thought, playing board games with your grandchildren, reading the newspaper, and doing cross-word puzzles are just a few examples of some of the mental exercises that you can do to enhance health. Having a balance between your physical and mental health is very important.

How can you exercise at home?

Look around your home. You probably have many things that could motivate you to keep moving. The following are some suggestions.

- Walking — All you need for walking is comfortable clothing, a pair of walking shoes, and a watch to keep track of your walking time. When walking, remember to stretch before and after your session to prevent soreness or injury. Start walking slowly. This allows the body to go from an inactive state to an active one more easily. Walking on your front street (if there are sidewalks/no cars), in the hallway of your home, or around your kitchen table are a few examples of how you can keep moving.
- Steps — If you have steps in your house, use them to your advantage. Make sure that there is a handrail securely fastened. When using the

stairs, be careful to take your time. Hold onto the handrail. When going down the steps make sure to place your entire foot on the step. Place both feet on the step before you continue to the next step. This will reduce the risk of unintentional falls.

- Outside — Enjoy the green grass, the smell of the flowers, and the sound of neighborhood birds. Walk around your yard, water the lawn and flowers, or plant flowers. Planting flowers in flower pots (if you do not have a garden) is a beautiful way to accent your home. You can even involve your neighborhood. Have a block planting party. Without even noticing it, you're doing exercises while improving the look of your home. While outside, always remember safety. Drink plenty of water (at least 8 ounces) regularly and remember to wear a hat and sunglasses for protection. If the temperature feels hot, check with your local news station to see if there are any weather advisory conditions for that day. If the weather forecast calls for the 3 H's (Hazy, Hot, and Humid), it is best to stay indoors.

Since you can exercise in your home no matter what the weather is like outside, make the most out of your situation. Let your answering machine take your calls, have a bottle of water (at least 8 ounces) and a towel close so you won't be interrupted. Now you are ready to spend some time for yourself. Put on the music and dance. Whether you have a home exercise plan or you are cleaning, gardening with neighbors, or just enjoying the beautiful day, keeping active is important. Dancing through life can lead to a "Healthier Tomorrow". Exercise and maintaining social contact are two of the "10 Keys" to Healthy Aging.

This column was written by Alicia Owens, Center for Healthy Aging Student Intern and Senior in Community Health at Slippery Rock University. For more information please call 412-580-1313.

For more Information about Exercise, check out the Center for Healthy Aging's website at www.healthyaging.pitt.edu. CHA is a part of the Department of Epidemiology in the Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh. It is one of 33 Prevention Research Centers in the United States funded by the Center for Disease Control. For questions and more information contact David J. Fetterman, Community Outreach Coordinator & Director of Education at the Center for Healthy Aging at 412-383-3121 or visit www.healthyaging.pitt.edu.