

York University Staff Association Health and Wellness News and Views

You've been indoors most of the winter, trying to stay motivated to get your butt to the gym. Then you hear it... The siren calls of warmer weather, calling you outside. You'd be wise to listen.

Why not use some of your exercise time to get out in the sunshine? Get some vitamin D and reconnect with the natural world. If you prefer the treadmill or enjoy the motivational atmosphere of a group fitness class, try to take advantage of a sunny day and walk to the gym. Even better incorporate the outdoors into your regular fitness program. Pleasant temperatures and the visual interests of your surroundings can not only motivate you to exercise, but help you enjoy it more.

The question is, what should you do once you get outdoors? Some of the best (and most enjoyable) fitness activities out there are walking, jogging, biking, swimming, hiking, kayaking... The list goes on and on.

Walking is actually one of the best lifetime sports. It's easy on the joints, you don't need a lot of that fancy equipment, and you can burn calories easily. Almost anyone can do it regardless of fitness level. According to national guidelines, walking at a brisk pace five days a week for thirty minutes will help ward off chronic pain and disease. Your risk of heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure goes down as a response to just increasing your physical activity that little bit. Beyond that, if you're trying to lose weight, you should shoot for sixty minutes of walking five days a week. You will be astonished at what a difference it makes.

Sound daunting? The trick is to incorporate walking into your daily life. You can break the time into several manageable spurts. Consider walking the kids to school or the bus stop. Hoofing it to pick up a bag of groceries, or go for a quick walk at lunch time. Maybe increase your pace when walking to your lunchtime fitness class. Walk the dog one more time

throughout the day, and finally take a stroll after dinner each evening. All you need are some good athletic shoes.

Jogging/Running Jogging is terrific for your heart and lungs, and it improves your stamina. If you are trying to lose weight, it can burn calories more quickly than walking. On the negative side, running does put more stress on the joints, knees, ankles and hips. The key is to start slowly. The general rule is to increase your time or distance by no more than 10% each week. Too much too soon and you can develop tendinitis or a variety of muscle and/or joint problems.

Many people who take up running become addicted to the sport. As you run your body releases endorphins. Endorphins act as your very own, natural happy drug, very addictive but also very good for you. Studies have found that aerobic exercise like running may be as effective as medication for treating depression.

Many people run because they like to socialize and be part of a running community. Running clubs and charity training groups give people the opportunity to meet and train with other people. Some runners participate in local events or travel to race destinations with their running buddies.

However if you decide to incorporate running into your life, it is important to have a good pair of running shoes. For women a quality sports bra.



Cycling Not only is bicycling an excellent cardiovascular exercise, it increases strength, balance and flexibility. The best part about getting

out on your bicycle is that it can be done by people of all ages, from childhood up and throughout the adult years.

Being out on your bike is also good for the environment. You are able to go places you want with one less car on the road. You don't bring the noise that a car generates and you can actually interact with people as you move. You can ride with a friend, wave to a neighbour, listen to the birds or even smell someone's dinner cooking.

Regardless of if you are riding purely for pleasure or for a specific purpose, you will arrive at your destination feeling relaxed, energized and happier about the world around you as well as yourself.

Swimming Whether you are one to get outside and jump in the lake for that early morning swim, or the type who prefers the luxury of a temperature controlled pool... Swimming is for everyone, not only is it fun, refreshing, and forgiving of excess weight or physical disabilities, but is a wonderful cardiovascular conditioner that also helps tone arms and legs, and it's very easy on joints. In fact, it's the perfect exercise for people who have muscle or joint problems. The weightlessness of the water helps them exercise pain free. Why get outside and swim?



Swimming has branched out from the darkened, indoor community pools of yesterday. Many new health chains offer outdoor pools, and local communities are finding renewed interest in outdoor facilities during the summer months. Seek out available recreational pools in your area, and if you are able, locate a natural body of water (lake, ocean, pond, or river) and explore the joys of getting outdoors.

Hiking provides a relaxing atmosphere for a workout that doesn't seem like a workout at all. Listening to the birds and enjoying the cool breeze of the forest, provides a break from daily stresses. It is a great way to incorporate the outdoors into your workout program. Hiking uses a lot of up-and-down movement, so you get a tremendous leg work out along with the cardiovascular benefits.

Hiking is also a great sport to do with family or friends. However it does require a bit of preparation. A beginner should do a little research and find short hikes that offer good scenery without too much difficulty or special equipment. You will also need to dress for changing temperatures – think layers. Be sure to bring adequate amount of water.

Outdoor Sports If you love recreational sports, you should find an outdoor sport to play. Playing sports outdoors is a great way to get exercise get outside and have fun. There are many different outdoor activities that you can take part in, baseball, basketball, tennis, golf, beach volleyball, soccer. The choices are endless! Whether you play to win or just play for fun, it doesn't seem to matter.

Exercising outside gives your body fresh new challenges. When you run, jog or even walk outside, you will be asking your body and your brain to complete more complex motions than those that are preformed on exercise equipment. You are also dealing with various terrain surfaces, which can provide further mental and physical challenges and help you improve your reflexes.

You never know what you will discover in the natural world...

So get outside and enjoy!

Questions or comments anyone?

Please email me at kerribr@yorku.ca with any questions or comments. I think we can all work together and learn from one another in hopes of achieving our goals.

Kerriane Brown

“I have found spending time in nature to be a deeply healing experience. The air, whether it flows through the trees or soars across the ocean has a cleansing quality as it impacts with my body. The earth grounds my being, while the trees lift my imagination to a higher place. I always leave refreshed, grounded, and uplifted.” **John Keats**