

Seniors know exercise is ageless

We've all seen them on the news: octogenarians entering marathons, septuagenarians in ski competitions and grandmothers who teach aerobics classes. While not all seniors are capable of that kind of athleticism, there is no reason that age should ever become a barrier to exercise.

According to senior-site.com, walking is by far the choice of exercise for seniors, with more than 30% of adults over age 55 stating that it's their preferred way of keeping fit. Swimming comes in second, followed by fishing, bicycling, camping and golf. But even the elderly who use wheelchairs or walkers can take part in exercises that strengthen their hearts and respiratory systems.

Walking has always been a favorite activity; it can take us to wonderful places while we get our heart rate going. There are seniors clubs across North America that meet for walking at malls, indoor tracks, and on nature trails, park trails and boulevards. As long as there is at least 1/2 mile in which to walk without more than one or two stops, a good walking program is possible.

Many think of walking as light exercise, but it has multiple benefits, particularly for seniors. Walking helps to lower blood pressure, and keeps joints, tendons and ligaments stretched and limber. It is useful in fighting osteoporosis, too, as it strengthens the bones in the legs, pelvis, and spine. Walkers enjoy increased energy and a slowing of the aging process.

As with any exercise, it's wise to check with your physician first, regardless of age. Other recommendations, as suggested by AARP, the Group Health

Cooperative of Washington and senior-site.com, include:

- Pick the right shoes, choosing a pair with leather or nylon uppers for breathability. Crepe or rubber soles are best, and wear cotton socks.

- Posture is very important when walking. Think of the military stance "at attention": Head up, shoulders back, stomach in.

- Take medium-length, even strides, and allow your arms to swing freely as you walk. Many walkers, after six months of exercise, carry light weights or wear wrist-weights for a more effective workout.

- Avoid walking when you are ill, or think you may be coming down with a cold. Don't walk on a full stomach, and watch out for extremes in outdoor temperature.

- Be aware of your breathing. Take even, regulated breaths, breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth. If you begin breathing in through your mouth out of necessity, you may be overdoing it.

- Start slow, be patient and don't expect immediate results. Keep with your program and the results will become obvious within a month or two.

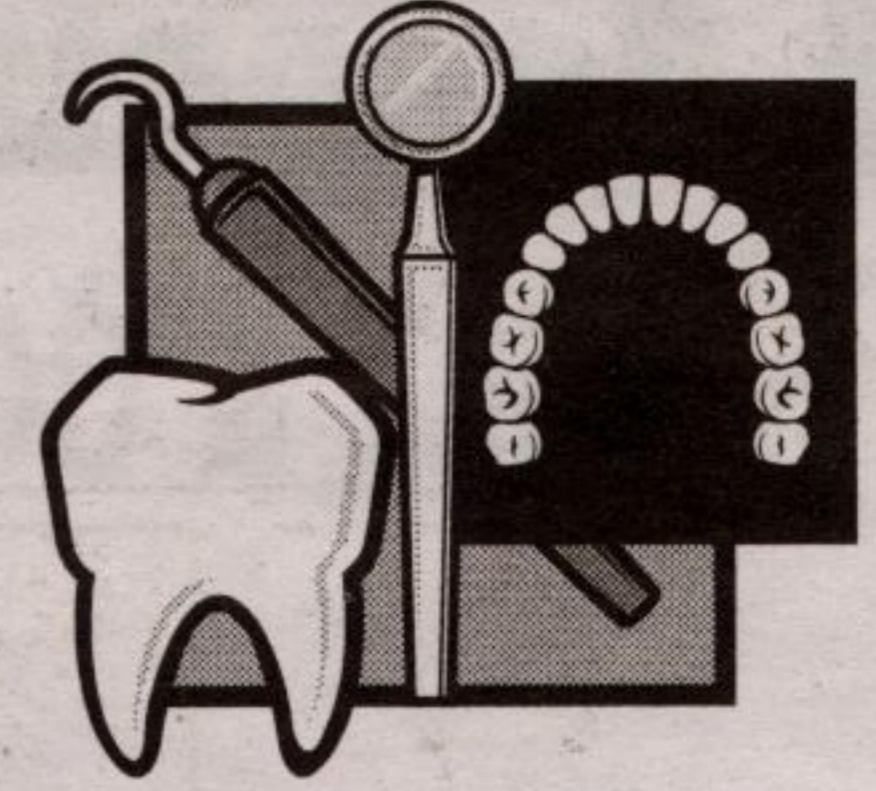
When beginning a walking regimen, a pedometer to measure distance is a good investment. Start with no more than 1/4 mile for the first two or three weeks, then increase to 1/2 mile for another two weeks. Build your endurance gradually in 1/4-mile increments until you're going a whole mile, which should take between 20 and 30 minutes.

—By Daniel Aspell, special

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I hope everyone had a terrific summer. Fall and winter are fast approaching. With the change of the seasons, we put away our summer sports gear and pull out our winter gear. Our first and foremost priority should be to give our gear and equipment a quick inspection. The main component of injury prevention is making sure that your equipment works, and fits you properly. Take it to a sports store for a tune up. Ensure that your equipment is appropriate for your height and weight. Second of all, remember that you have been away from these sports for a year. Despite being active all summer, your fall/winter activities require different muscles and proprioceptive use. You need to make sure you prepare your body (ie) stretching, strengthening, proprioceptive and sport-specific training. Play safe!

Marta