

Health, Beauty & Fitness

Become more active—one step at a time

One of the most memorable moments of film history was in the 1976 boxing picture *Rocky* – Rocky Balboa running up the 72 steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and literally jumping for joy.

The low-budget movie written by and starring Sylvester Stallone launched his career, was a smash hit world wide, and ended up winning the Best Picture Oscar. Today, a statue of Rocky stands in front of a Philadelphia sports stadium, and every year thousands of visitors to the city try to re-enact his famous run.

The film's appeal is not about boxing—most people don't even remember that Rocky actually loses his fight against the world champion. It is his fight to beat the odds and achieve an almost impossible level of physical strength that resonates with viewers. We identify with his exhaustion and disappointment when he can't make it up the museum steps on his first attempt, we see his struggle to develop endurance, and we feel the pure joy of that victorious scene at the end of his second run.

Like Rocky, many of us are not at the peak of physical fitness. A National Mobility Study by the Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) and Ipsos Reid showed that most Canadians find vigorous activities difficult, many have trouble walking a kilometre, and more than 25 per cent have trouble simply bending or kneeling.

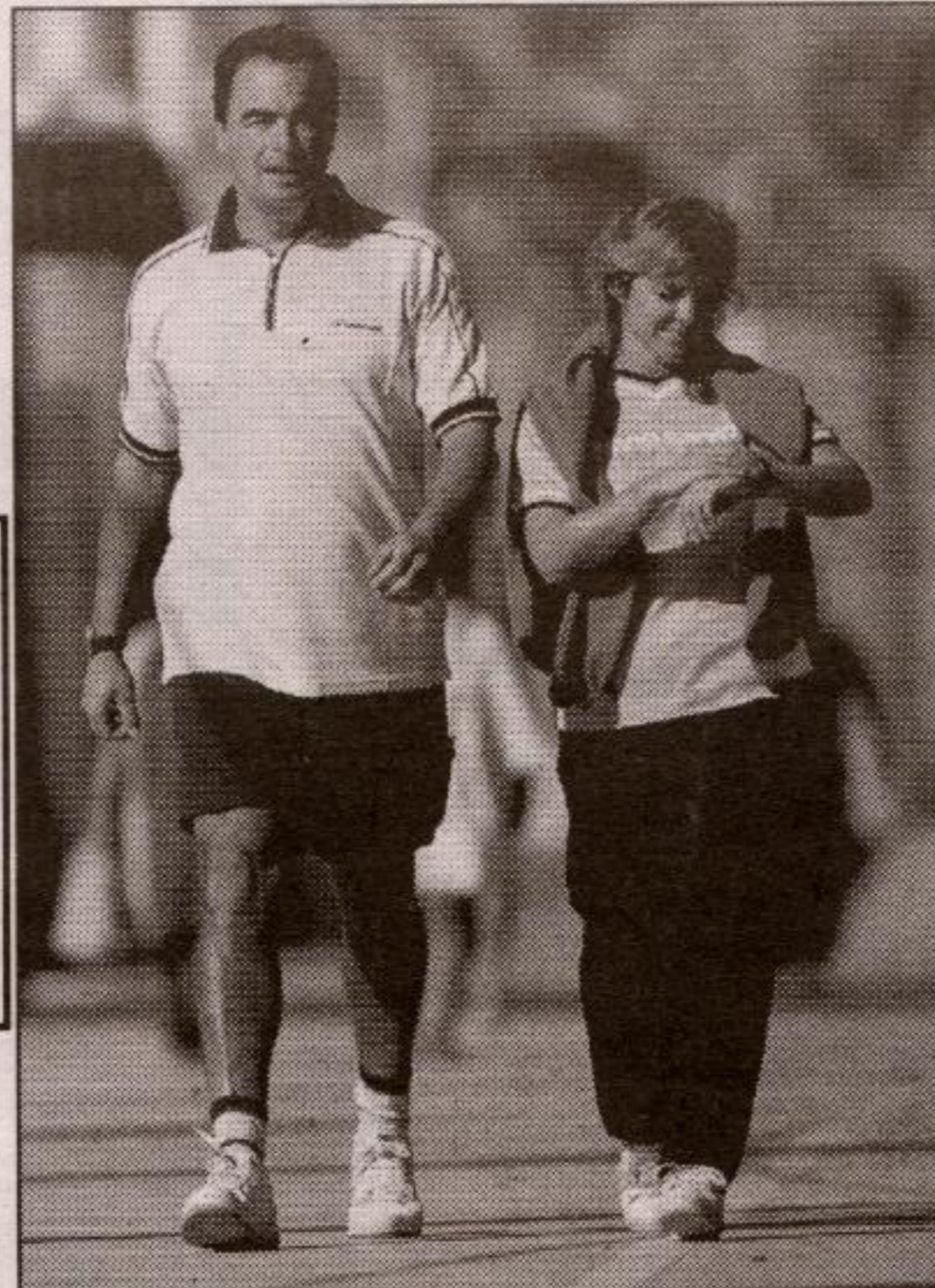
It is clear that Canadians need to get active. However, since most of us are not

professional athletes, we don't need to put quite as much effort into fitness as Rocky did.

Rhonda Erskine, a physiotherapist at William Osler Health Centre, says even everyday chores can be a part of overall better health.

"I tell people to try and do about an hour of activity a day," she says. "But that can include many things—walking the dog, doing housework, yard work, mowing the lawn—whatever gets you moving."

National Physiotherapy



Month runs from April 24 to May 24 this year. The CPA is encouraging Canadians to make a commitment to gain and maintain personal mobility through enjoyable activities like golfing, gardening, walking, and jogging.

Golf, for example, provides both cardiovascular and strengthening benefits because it combines walking and arm movement. And although gardening may seem like a gentle activity, it involves a great deal of bending, stretching, lifting and repetitive movement, all of which contribute to flexi-

bility, strength and endurance.

At Osler, there are approximately 65 physiotherapists who are part of multi-disciplinary teams in medical and surgical inpatient units and outpatient clinics. They treat patients with a wide variety of conditions, including strokes, respiratory ailments, sports injuries, and brain injuries.

The physiotherapists assess each patient's physical condition and develop individual treatment plans. They work with patients, using a combination of machines, manual therapy, and exercises, to improve balance and coordination, restore or increase flexibility and movement, and build strength. Where there is a permanent weakness, as in the case of some stroke patients, physiothera-

py can maximize existing mobility to help patients be as independent as possible.

Sometimes progress is very quick. At other times, it requires patience and determination on the part of both patient and physiotherapist. Erskine recalls one patient who had been seriously ill and didn't even have the strength to sit up in bed.

"I started her off with just easy stretches. It took several months of work, before she was able to stand. Then, she was transferred out of

my ward. Recently, she came to see me and walked across the room. That was awesome!"

Erskine says that even without an underlying medical condition, as people get older they find that day-to-day pursuits become harder. Becoming more physically active can help slow the decline in mobility that comes with age.

One activity she often suggests is walking. It's inexpensive—all you need is a good pair of shoes—and requires no training or special skills to begin. Walking increases flexibility and endurance, improves lung and heart health and is good for the circulation.

Check with your doctor before undertaking any strenuous exercise program and be sure to include stretching before and after activities as part of the warm-up and cool down process. Doing a variety of activities rather than the same one all the time prevents boredom and uses different muscle groups.

Erskine also suggests taking frequent breaks and changing positions often. "It helps reduce muscle strain from overwork, particularly when you're involved in activities involving reaching, bending or twisting."

And the final piece of advice—don't give up. Improving your physical fitness takes time. Even Sylvester Stallone couldn't run up the Museum of Art steps on his first try. He had to train in order to do it for the movie scene.

The statements made in this column are for general information only. If you have comments on this column, call our community contact line at 905-494-2120, ext. 22505 or e-mail us at oslerconnection@oslerhc.org

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