Stay active, even in the winter



Snow may be falling, the temperature is dropping, the sky is grey, the days are short, and everyone seems to be sniffling and sneezing. It's no wonder most of us just want to stay at home wrapped in a blanket until Spring.

The winter months don't have to be gloomy. There's a sure-fire way to lift your mood and boost your immune system – regular exercise. Don't like skiing, skating or other winter activities? Can't stand the cold? No problem. You just need to be creative and more importantly, stay motivated.

How much is enough?

Both Health Canada and the American Heart Association recommend at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity a week. That sounds like a lot but you can reach this target ten minutes at a time. Better yet, any indoor or outdoor household chore that gets your heart rate up will do the trick such as vacuuming, clearing snow, raking leaves or mopping floors.

Staying motivated

There are a lot of excuses not to get out in the winter: it's too cold, too dark, too wet or too time-consuming. It can be tough to make activity a priority. Here are some ways to help you stay motivated – and have fun at the same time regardless of the weather conditions.

- **Get the kids involved.** Lots of snow? Get everyone outside to build a snowman, make snow angels or have a snowball fight. Incorporate exercise into TV watching. Use every commercial break to get the whole family up in a quick competition – who can do the most pushups or lunges? But make sure everyone stretches properly first. The kids will think exercise is fun and keep you laughing!
- **Have an activity buddy.** Knowing someone is expecting you at yoga class or joining you for a morning walk not only keeps you accountable but motivated.
- **Set small, realistic goals.** Expecting to play three periods of hockey when you haven't stepped on the ice in years may only make you feel discouraged, deflated and sore! Taking small steps will help you stay focused and on track – walking a bit further every day, doing more pushups every week or skating more laps around the local rink over a month. Track your progress and reward yourself for reaching every target.
- **Try something new**. Challenge yourself by trying a winter activity like curling or snowshoeing or a year-round sport such as badminton, dodgeball or ping pong. Local community centres offer a wide range of activities for young and not-so-young alike.

Embracing winter

Here are some more ideas to get out and stay active, despite the weather:

- **Mall walking**. This is growing in popularity with all ages but especially with seniors. Many shopping malls open early to allow people to walk or jog the halls. The stores may be closed but there is access to washrooms, water fountains and benches – and it's a good way to meet people.
- **Bowling**. A new generation is discovering that bowling is a great social and physical activity. Most bowling alleys have leagues for adults and kids, experts and beginners.
- **Snow tubing, sledding and tobogganing.** Barreling down a hill is not only a lot of fun but you'll get a workout walking up again.
- **Nature walks.** There is plenty of wildlife to look for, pine cones to collect and fresh, clean air to breath in local woodlands, parks and conservation areas – and it's free (be aware that conservations areas may not allow the family dog)!

Avoiding winter

If the weather is too frightful, here are some ideas to stay fit without leaving the house:

- **Set up your own circuit training**. Grab a quick 10-minute workout with circuit training at home. Set the timer to go off every minute (you can increase time as your fitness improves).
    - First ding: warm up - stretches and jog in place
    - Second ding: 10 sit ups
    - Third ding: 10 push ups
    - Fourth ding: 10 jumping jacks
    - Fifth ding: 10 squats
    - Sixth ding: 10 triceps dips (use the dining room table)

  And so on… ending with a 60-second cool down. Involve the kids and run to a different room for each exercise.

- **Combine your workout with housework**. Do lunges while vacuuming, squats while loading the washer or dryer or leg lifts while washing up. Run upstairs (don't use the rail). Dust or clean in a circular, forceful motion and do press ups on the kitchen counter while waiting for the coffee to brew (make sure the counter is dry so you don't slip).

  If you have a baby, do household chores with your child strapped or wrapped next to your body – cardio, weight training and a happy baby all at the same time!

- **Stream or download an exercise program.** There are a variety of exercise programs available to download or stream. Be sure to start with one that is suitable for your fitness level that you can complete safely, without pain.

- **Dance.** Crank up the music and have a 10-minute dance party with the whole family or by yourself.

Check with your family physician before starting any vigorous activity (including shoveling snow). Remember to start slowly and gently. For more great ideas on how to stay active this winter, contact your Employee and Family Assistance Program.