

Tips for Maintaining Outdoor Activity in Inclement Weather

“Moving Grays Harbor”
By Maryann Welch

It's happening. The days are getting shorter and the nights are getting colder. It certainly has been easy to be active outdoors during our mild and dry spring and summer. I've been able to walk, bike, hike, and kayak while wearing shorts and a tank top and, only occasionally, a light jacket.

Soon enough we'll be dashing for cover while running our errands and wishing for days without rain. Such is life on the Harbor! The changing of the seasons doesn't mean that we have to abandon those outside activities that we love...we just have to adapt. I've lived on the Harbor most all of my life and have learned to accept and even embrace those rainy winter days.

In mid-September I find myself looking ahead and preparing myself to keep up my level of activity even when mornings and evenings are dark and days can be rainy, windy, cold or icy – sometimes all at the same time!

Because I fit my daily workout in before work the diminishing light means I no longer have the option to get outside in the early morning. I live in an area with no street lights or sidewalks, which is probably true for many readers.

I know that some people strap on head lamps for dark walks. In these circumstances it is important to keep visibility in mind. Be certain you can be seen by drivers. Shoes and jackets that come with reflective strips are essential to your personal safety. Even carrying a flashlight can alert drivers of your presence.

If you are riding a bicycle in the early morning or evening hours, it is also important to use extra precautions. Yes, bicycles come with reflectors on the pedals, but the more visible you can make yourself, the safer you will be. Make sure you have reflective strips on your helmet and clothing that is not covered up by a hydration or backpack. Also, a headlight mounted to the front of your bike is an essential safety item.

Aside from safety, there are other things that you can do in the fall and winter that will increase your enjoyment of outdoor physical activity.

In a previous column I mentioned that my friend Marnie and I have walked in some extreme weather conditions. Our gear has evolved over the years to the point where we now can stay warm and dry no matter what Mother Nature throws at us.

I recall one of our early foul weather walks in Raymond on a New Years Day. We both had rain coats and pants that were a neoprene based fabric, carried umbrellas and wore our regular walking shoes. A howling wind and pouring rain made the umbrellas useless and our feet were soggy in no time. The rain gear did a fair job of keeping us dry from the outside, but we were damp on the inside from our fast walking. The fabric wasn't "breathable" and the end result was we were cold and wet anyway.

We've come a long way. I now have a hooded Gore-Tex jacket that is not

only breathable but has zippers under the arms for extra ventilation if needed. Add in Gore-Tex pants, shoes and gloves, an oilskin baseball cap (to keep the rain off of my glasses) and I can keep dry and warm in any weather. My Birthday wish-list always has a Gore-Tex item or two requested!

Another trick I've learned is layering under the rain gear. I've found that silk long johns are an essential component to my winter walks and I occasionally find the need to use wool socks with silk liners as well. Being dressed for the elements makes outdoor activity even more enjoyable.

I'm sure that many of you have had unpleasant experiences with exercising in the elements and I want to encourage you to never give up. Find the outdoor wear that works for your activity and keep at it. If nothing else, dash to your car and head over to the mall for some indoor walking when the weather doesn't cooperate. Spring will be here before you know it.

Maryann Welch is the director of Grays Harbor County's Public Health and Social Services Department.

If you have questions about becoming more active or have information about free or low-cost activity in the area, contact the health department at 532-8665 ext. 483, e-mail us at moving@co.grays-harbor.wa.us or visit our web site at www.ghphss.org.