

Former Couch Potato Learned Benefits of Everyday Activity

“Moving Grays Harbor”
By Maryann Welch

I have a confession to make: I'm a bit of a health nut.

This confession comes as no surprise to my family or coworkers, but as the director of the county's Public Health Department presenting these columns, I felt a need to come clean with all you readers too.

I like to exercise. I enjoy walking, biking, skiing, gardening, and just about anything that involves moving. I'm even a little bit compulsive about wearing a pedometer to count my steps and then jotting them down everyday.

I've found several keys to maintaining my level of physical activity. Over the years, I've figured out shoes and gear that allow me to walk comfortably in any weather. I have an understanding spouse who both helps out and puts up with all the time I commit to exercise. My good friend, Marnie, and I have kept each other sane through life's ups and downs by walking and talking.

I am also inspired by my parents who have enjoyed excellent health into their 80s due to their life-long habits of physical activity.

What's the point of this long-winded confession? I worried when I started writing these columns that especially people who knew me would think, "She doesn't understand the struggle to lose weight or to exercise."

So, that's why I'm confessing where I am today. And, I need to tell you the

rest of the story: I haven't always been an avid exerciser.

About 15 years ago, I felt more like a slug. I wasn't exactly sick, I just didn't have much energy and I certainly didn't exercise much.

One day I went to the doctor for yet another sinus infection. This time I got medicine plus a mini lecture on the importance of exercise to promote general health.

For some reason, this time the message clicked. Exercise wasn't just for someone training to compete, nor was it only for people desperate to drop a few pounds. Exercise was a basic health prescription for anybody's body. And that included me.

I began by getting a Nordic Track and walking whenever I could. I found the best time for me to exercise was early in the morning before it was light, so next came a treadmill.

I also found that walks could be a way to spend time with friends. After a while, it was possible to work in the yard and garden all weekend and not have sore muscles on Monday.

The next thing I realized, those sinus infections and all sorts of minor aches and pains, which I had just thought were part of getting older, were gone.

I share my story today to emphasize that while being active does help people lose weight, it also has many, many more health benefits.

Some people (about 1/3 of Grays Harbor adults) don't need to lose weight. But regardless of your weight, exercise and increased fitness helps your body in so many ways.

Exercise gives many health benefits

The County Health Officer, Dr. John Bausher says that moving your body can create a better mental outlook and help you relieve stress. It also will give you better muscle tone, strengthen your heart and lungs and help you lose weight.

Next week we'll have Dr. Bausher discuss in depth many of the benefits of exercise.

This week's challenge

Regardless of whether you need to lose weight, this week when you think (and participate in) any physical activity, think about all the health benefits you're giving your body. And then add a few more minutes just for the health of it.

Mark your calendar

- **Any day** – Get out and celebrate spring...take a walk on Morrison Riverfront Walkway in east Aberdeen. This is a 1.8-mile paved trail behind Walmart from the Guesthouse Inn and Suites to Lakeside Industries.
- **Plan for spring break** – The Aberdeen Parks and Recreation department has scheduled three fun-filled afternoon activities for kids – bowling, roller-skating and swimming. Don't just lie around in front of the television this week! Call 537-3230 for more information.

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 public 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.