

You're all wet if you think fitness isn't fun

**“Moving Grays Harbor”
by Maryann Welch**

It's official. Memorial Day Weekend signals the start of “boating season” – which essentially means the sun is shining - and we are fortunate in Grays Harbor to have many ways to enjoy the water that surrounds us. Those of you with children know that nothing is more enticing than splashing in the water whether it is indoors or out, ocean, lake, river or pool. Water “play” can also be a great activity for adults. When I think back to those 80 degree days last week I dearly wish I could have been paddling a kayak and enjoying the weather on the water instead of sitting in an air-conditioned meeting room in Spokane!

Summer is typically a busy time of year with family gatherings, kids looking for something to do and those sunny days that inspire us to pack up the car and head to the nearest body of water. Sometimes this means that we have an excuse to not get our exercise in for the day, but this should not be the case at all. In fact, it should be easier to get plenty of activity when you are near the water.

Water is such a great medium for increasing your activity level, but it is one that most adults shy away from. The common misconception about exercising in or on the water is that you have to be a good swimmer to do it. This is definitely not true. You can get significant benefits from just treading, walking or jogging in the water and you

don't even have to get your hair wet! As far as exercising on the water you could surf, body board, kayak, paddle or just lounge in a tube and propel yourself along to get a good bout of exercise. And all of these can (and in most cases should) be done with a lifejacket on at all times.

As I stated earlier, I really enjoy kayaking, but I am also a fan of playing in the water. A few months ago I was able to go to the new water park in Ocean Shores with a 5 year old and an 8 year old. Talk about a good workout!! It was a challenge and a joy to try to keep up with them. When you are letting your kids enjoy the water venues this summer, don't count yourself out – play with them and everyone wins.

Other indoor water activity options other than lap swimming are “aquacise” classes which are very popular and participants reap the same strength and cardiovascular benefits that they would if they were exercising on dry land. Exercising in the water also keeps you cooler and is easier on your joints than full weight-bearing activity. But, you don't have to be in a formal class to be active in the water. Volleying a beach ball back and forth or playing tag in the water will get that heart rate up as well.

As with all activities highlighted in this column there are some cautions to emphasize. We all know that the rivers and Ocean waters in our area are potentially dangerous and it is up to each of us to respect that aspect of nature and be responsible in choosing our water-related activities. The Washington Department of Health offers these tips for water safety:

- 1. Know and respect the water**
- 2. Know your abilities**
- 3. Wear a life jacket**

4. Be prepared for emergencies

For a more detail, you can access the DOH website at www.doh.wa.gov/Topics/WaterSafety.htm.

Another safety concern is related to public pools, spray parks and wading facilities. Eric Khambatta, an Environmental Health Specialist for Grays Harbor County, tells me that there are 72 such water facilities in the county with half of those being outside with limited operational seasons. Environmental Health aims to do water quality testing at each of these facilities on a quarterly basis or as needed, but Eric states that the crux of community pool safety really lies with the users. "The facilities should make sure that they have adequate barrier protection around the pools to help prevent accidental drowning, but all users have a responsibility as well."

Eric shares that although it is relatively rare, people can be infected with a chlorine-resistant pathogen (Cryptosporidium) that is introduced into the water by swimmers who are ill with diarrhea. He suggests the following hygiene-related precautions:

1. Do not swim when you have diarrhea.
2. Do not swallow or allow pool water to get into your mouth.
3. Shower (with soap and water) before you swim – kids, too!
4. Wash your hands after using the toilet or changing diapers.
5. Take children on bathroom breaks or change diapers often.
6. Change children's diapers in a bathroom, not at poolside.

Recreating in and on all our local water ways is a privilege we should all enjoy. We here at Grays Harbor County Public Health Department and at the Grays Harbor County Division of Environmental Health wish you a healthy and safe summer of water activities. Oh, and don't forget the sunscreen!

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.