

# Weight Training for “Couch Potatoes” ...

Moving Grays Harbor  
By Maryann Welch

As I am starting to get a taste of “this retirement thing”, I see how easy it can be to let the days get away from me. Yes, I have found myself thinking “I’ll take that hike later” only to be sidetracked by one thing or another and pretty soon the day is over. I’ve found that steps do add up faster on my pedometer as I go about my daily business without being tied to a desk – however, more than ever, I must schedule an appointment for targeted activity to maintain my fitness goals, even if it’s with myself. . Registering for an early morning spinning class and responding to the walking expectations of our black lab, Coda, have been two successful strategies so far. As I continue to adjust to unstructured days I am realizing that this can be a significant barrier to regular physical activity.

A friend of mine and a former County Commissioner, Dick Dixon, recently requested that I focus an article on exercises for “couch potatoes”...and of course, I take that to imply that he is almost ready to commit to increasing his physical activity level. Of course, he also mentioned recliner and remote control in the same sentence, but it got me to thinking. I know a lot of you readers are in the same boat. You know you should do something but really just don’t know where to start. I agree that the weather can be a deterrent and joining a club can be intimidating, but there are many exercises you can do inside your own house that don’t take a lot of equipment

or time. In fact, recent research suggests that just 15-20 minutes of strength training 2-3 times a week will produce significant results. If you just did exercises during every commercial in an hour-long TV program you would have that covered.

As far as the “what to do”, the Mayo Clinic recommends that you complete a series of exercises for your arms, shoulders, abdomen, chest, back and legs. And most of you will be happy to know that research shows that a single set of 12 repetitions with the proper weight (heavy enough to fatigue your muscles at 12 repetitions) can build muscle just as efficiently as can three sets of the same exercise...you don’t have to spend hours weight-lifting to reap rewards. Once the 12<sup>th</sup> repetition becomes easy, you add a little more weight and again work up to 12 repetitions.

Although I can’t offer specific instruction on exercises to do, I can tell you that there are numerous resources that can get you going in the right direction. The Olympic Area Agency on Aging has a pamphlet from the Washington State Department of Health that covers specific exercises and they might even have videos left for home exercises. Timberland Regional Library also has a few instructional exercise DVD’s for loan and your own personal physician can provide you with guidelines and advice as well.

For you non-couch potatoes out there, I really want to emphasize the importance of doing resistance exercises. Personally, I know that I would rather be doing something aerobic such as hiking or biking, but strength training is an equally important component in every fitness plan. Not only has research proven that maintaining muscle mass as we age helps with all aspects of health, it has also proven that it is never too late to get started. People in their 80’s and 90’s can still improve their strength and

quality of life by participating in resistance training.

And the same guidelines apply to those of you who are already active. You only need to do 12 repetitions of each exercise to realize significant strength gains. You can find many articles both on-line and in magazines that can guide you in choosing the exercises that are effective and appropriate for you.

For anyone, it is important to also consider your posture while weight training. One of the biggest mistakes that people can make is to lift too much and have poor mechanics while lifting. When done properly, weight-bearing resistance exercises can help improve the strength in your core muscles (hips, back and stomach) and improve your balance.

As you can see, there are many benefits to adding resistance exercises to your life. For those of us who like to eat and enjoy those scrumptious holiday treats, I've saved the most compelling reason for last! It is estimated that a pound of muscle burns about 3 times more calories per day than a pound of fat and that is just at rest. When the muscles are being actively used, they burn a lot more. Maybe even 1 piece of cheesecake more!

So, to my friend Dick and all the other self-proclaimed "couch potatoes" out there, I hope this helps inspire you to "get moving". I truly see health as the most significant gift you can give to yourself and those who love you – especially as we approach the holiday season.

*Maryann Welch is the recently retired 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](mailto:moving@co.grays-harbor.wa.us) or visit our web site at [www.ghphss.org](http://www.ghphss.org).*