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Sue Ann Says: Get Outside! Get Active!

Are you bored to tears when you walk on the treadmill at your gym? Are you up at dawn lifting weights in your dim bedroom while your spouse remains sleeping? Do your children or grandchildren prefer to play on their computer than go to play at the park? It's time for a change! This month I want to help you shift your mindset that exercise must be in a large building where you are jogging beside 28 other people. Understand I am not against gyms. They provide great support, numerous classes and various machines to keep your heart beating at its peak performance. But exercising in nature has special benefits for the mind and body. Exercise can happen anywhere, but as spring bursts into summer, let's plan on getting outside to be active!

Exercise = Healthy Mind

Outside activities and exercise can brighten your mood, lower your risk of depression and help you sleep better at night. The activity you choose can augment your judgment and keep you mentally sharp. Researchers have seen gains in memory for adults that worked out the morning of a memory study compared to adults that did not work out.¹ A 2011 study released in the *Environmental Science Technology* journal stated "*Compared with exercising indoors, exercising in natural environments was associated with greater feelings of revitalization and positive engagement, decreases in tension, confusion, anger, and depression, and increased energy.*"²

Exercise = Strong Body

How does exercise help your body? Let me count the ways.

1. Your heart will pump more oxygen to your muscles making them stronger.
2. Your lungs will be working more efficiently.
3. As blood flows to your brain you will feel more focused.
4. Exercise will increase your bone mass fending off broken bones as you age.
5. Weight bearing exercise helps prevent osteoporosis.
6. The brain releases endorphins making you feel less stressed.
7. Vitamin D from the sun helps your genes, increases immunity and calcium metabolism.

Which Outside Activity is Right for You?

Choosing lawn or garden work is an excellent way to burn off calories and strengthen your heart. Have you been itching to build a rock wall, trim up some bushes or plant new iris bulbs? The CDC affirms that gardening is an excellent physical activity. Activity reduces your risk of high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, heart disease, stroke, depression, colon cancer and premature death. You can burn approximately 238 calories when weeding the garden. Trimming the shrubs will subtract 238 calories per hour and if you manually mow the lawn you can reduce your daily calorie count by 306 calories per hour.

Family activities in nature are a fantastic way to bond as a family while building strong muscles and bones. Take your children on a nature walk around the neighborhood. Identify local birds and insects. Seek out some tadpoles. Listen to the crickets in the evening as you walk. Get out the badminton set and set up a team challenge. Bike to the library or to the store and grab your supper for a waist slimming ride. Each time you move your body, you strengthen your overall health including the health of your family.

Tennis is a delightful way to get your cardio and enjoy some time with a friend. Many cities have local tennis courts for your use. Tennis can reduce your blood pressure, decrease body fat, amplify your reaction time, and build flexibility. Tennis is a sport that can be played by a person of any age.

Chase away unhealthy habits with a round of golf in the mornings with your friends. Walking 18 holes is the key to getting up to 3 to 4 miles of exercise. Golfing builds muscles, boosts concentration and will help you lose weight. The green trees and sun-warmed grass adds to the attraction of being outside.

Swimming is one of the best ways to add years to your life. Check out the local pools for adult swim time, aqua fitness workouts or even one-on-one training with an instructor. You can swim at a lake or ocean beach but always swim with a lifeguard present. Swimming is an excellent cardiovascular workout and can burn as many as 400 calories an hour when swimming at a slow pace. This low impact activity is great for your joints, muscles and mind. With the sun outside and a soft breeze, your mood will definitely brighten.

If you really want to be adventurous, pack up some water and a small bag of fruit and go hiking. There are plenty of parks, hills, and valleys where you can hike in Wisconsin. To make it even more fun, make yourself a walking stick to take on the journey. Many of the parks have maps that show the difficulty of the trail. Start out slow on the leveled path and enjoy the bluff or streams along the way. As your fitness develops over the summer you can increase to a more difficult path. Don't forget the sunscreen and bug spray!

Break Out of the Same Old Routine

Add a new twist to your daily exercise by heading outside this summer. Take advantage of our beautiful days in Wisconsin to stay healthy.

Because it all begins with a healthy woman...

Sue Ann Thompson is founder and president of the Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation (WWHF), a statewide non-profit organization whose mission is to help Wisconsin women and their families reach their healthiest potential. WWHF provides programs and conducts forums that focus on education, prevention, and early detection; connects individuals to health resources; produces and distributes the most up-to-date health education and resource materials; and, awards grants and scholarships to women health researchers and related community non-profits. To learn more, visit wwhf.org or call 1-800-448-5148.

[1 Neuroscience 2012 Jul 26;215:59-68](#)

[2 http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21291246](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21291246)