

## GET MOVING!

A new adage that I have heard over the past few years is “sitting is the new smoking.” It turns out that movement improves our physical health, our cognitive ability, our creativity and mental health. Movement is more than getting exercise. It is any physical activity that gets you interacting with your environment. June is a perfect month to get more active. The weather invites us outdoors and the dangers of ice and snow are behind us for several months (I hope).

This year has reduced the reasons we have to get out and move and it is easy to get settled on the couch or in a chair at home, reading, watching TV, Zoom meetings, emailing... Along with the limitations surrounding the pandemic, some of our members have limitations with mobility and pain, some of us are trying out new knees and hips. No need to be discouraged – we can greatly improve our wellbeing by making small and steady changes.

Here is the good news. Those of us who have been the least active have the most to gain by making small changes in activity. Levitin (2020), in his book *Successful Aging*, reports that those of us who are inactive make the largest health gains by just beginning to move to occasional activity (just a bare minimum of getting up and walking a bit). It's like quitting smoking. Those who recently quit make the biggest gains in lung health compared to those who quit years ago.

So, getting out of your chair and taking short walks has enormous benefits for your overall wellbeing. Getting active may mean starting to walk for 5 minutes a day and increasing your time slowly to 15 and finally 30 minutes a day. Just move, no need to compete with anyone. You don't have to have a goal of running a marathon, competing in a half iron man or cycling for 50k. Nor do you need to set a goal to lose weight. Taking a stroll outside to look at neighbours' flower gardens, to feed and watch birds or to be out in nature; such simple activities can have a big effect on overall health.

For better physical health, I defer to those trained in physiology. Consult your physician or physiotherapist. There is a lot of research that getting both aerobic exercise (walking, swimming, cycling, running, dancing) and anaerobic exercise (strength and weight training) increase our overall fitness. Talk to your medical and health professionals to find out what combination is best for you.

Moving also improves our cognitive abilities. Even small amounts of movement (like 10 minutes on a stationary bike without raising your heartbeat) increases memory. That's right... studies show that inactive adults who start minimal movement increase their memory capacity after moving 10 minutes.

If you already move occasionally or moderately, walking or running in a complicated situation adds to your cognitive ability. For example, walking on a path with tree roots and rocks and ups and downs is a great workout for your neurology. (Watch your balance though). So is walking in a crowded mall dodging others and looking at all of the displays...but we won't be doing that for a while. When you have to plan your motor movements, it provides a good workout for your brain as well as your heart and muscles.

Movement also helps us with creativity. If you have ever been stuck while writing, solving a puzzle or working through a problem, you know that walking away from it gets the creativity flowing again.

Kelly McGonigal (2021) writes about the many benefits of movement in her book, *The Joy of Movement*. One of the most interesting points she raises is that physical movement can bring on a sense of joy. It can also bring about a sense of social cohesion. Dancing to the same beat, playing instruments or singing together or even clapping and tapping in the same rhythm can bring a sense of group purpose and unity. Think of how much further you can walk when you are with someone else walking at the same pace. Military people know that marching together gives a sense of unity and adding a drum or musical instrument energizes the whole group.

It seems that movement and interacting with the environment is especially good for us. So, park a little further away from your destination. Take a walk through the park and notice the plants, birds and the movement of light through the trees. Stand up and cheer when the Blue Jays get a hit, (I am not sure cheering for the Maple Leafs is good for us), get up and move when a commercial comes on the television. Dance when you hear music from the radio or television.

Stand when you talk on the phone. Join a Zoom dance class. Go out and garden. Watch birds. Play clapping games with your young grandchildren.

Get moving!