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Tip Sheet

Taking Your Exercise Indoors For the Winter

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The cold of winter forces most of us inside. For many this results in a significant drop in fitness and regression to a sedentary lifestyle for 3-5 months. Don't let this happen to you! Whether you are an athlete, a walker/hiker, or a gardener you should seize the opportunity to focus on your strength, flexibility, and cardiovascular fitness. Below are some tips and ideas, **but caution to check with a physical therapist or healthcare professional before starting this or any exercise activity so you can proceed safely and appropriately for your specific condition and ability:**

Cardiovascular (Aerobic) Fitness:

1. Do cardio intervals with increased intensity.

Treadmills, stationary bikes, and elliptical machines can work well but there can be a tendency to go too easy compared to biking, walking, or running outside. Go through a typical 5-10 minute easy pace warm up then mix in 3-6 intervals of 30-60 seconds at a higher pace, heavier resistance, or more incline. Go back to your easy pace/resistance or flat incline for 2-3 minutes between harder intervals for 20-45 minutes of total exercise.

2. You don't always have to go real hard.

Watch a movie or one hour show while walking or biking very slowly. Keep it slow so you don't work up a sweat or get out of breath. No need to put your exercise clothes on and keep it low enough so that you don't even feel tired. You can do this outside of your regular exercise session and just move easy for an extended period of time to keep your body moving instead of sitting or lying on a chair or sofa. You will be slowly burning calories and will likely curb the urge to go grab something from the fridge. This is not enough by itself, but a great addition to your other exercise.

3. You don't need a treadmill or stationary bike

Standing in an open area, alternate a variety of movements to keep yourself going for at least 20 minutes. March in place, do mini squats, side to side weight shift, side to side shuffle, mini jumps with gentle landing, jumping jacks, large

controlled arm movements moving forward and sideways or perhaps low impact aerobic exercise videos, most of which can be obtained for free on the internet and various smartphone apps.

4. Do a stairway exercise routine!

Surprisingly interesting and fun. This works well for leg strength and some cardio fitness. Take precaution to avoid falls or tripping by having and using a handrail. Avoid pain in the knees, but OK to feel your thigh muscles ache a bit from fatigue. Warm up with slow steady single stepping one step at a time up and down for 3-5 minutes. Then proceed to climbing up two steps at a time moving very slow and controlled to place a higher load on your muscles keeping your pelvis level and either use the rail to help slightly or just balance with hand support. On the way back down go back to one step at a time (better not to pound down two steps on the descent) and lower very slowly from one step to the next feeling the work in the front of your thighs (don't do this one if it hurts in the front of your knees; muscle ache during is OK, but no joint pain in knees, hips, or back). Then go back to single stepping up and down for 3-5 minutes perhaps a little quicker, but always in control and no joint pain. **If you balance is bad, don't risk a fall!** You can get a similar workout just using the bottom step of a stairway and using one or both handrails. Step up forward onto just the bottom step, then step back down and repeat alternating legs. Repeat this for ½ to 1 minute and rest as needed repeating 10-50 reps as able. Again, start with just a few and build up slowly to more repetitions over several weeks if no joint pain in knees, hips, or back. Muscle soreness is OK but should dissipate after a day or so. If not, you did too much. **Check with your physical therapist or healthcare professional to do this or any exercise safely and effectively for your specific condition.**

Strength Training

1. Got Gravity?

The current trend, even among athletes, is to use bodyweight and gravity to do what are called “functional movements”. These are movements that may simulate daily life and typical activities that require you to balance and coordinate your body in ways that you encounter getting in and out of your car, getting up from a chair, getting up and down from the floor (an important skill as you age) and carrying things while maintaining your balance. Within a few weeks you will notice in your daily life that you have a greater ease of movement and more confidence with your balance and stamina. You may be able to work through some the activities listed below by just easing into them on your own. Do them two times per week. Later if you want to add some light dumbbells, weight machines, or elastic bands it is best to get some personalized instruction from a physical therapist or healthcare professional. Start with doing a few of the following and emphasize quality of movement doing them for time vs. a number of reps. **It is normal to feel some muscle soreness for 12-24 hours, but go easy and work more on being consistent (do them regularly) rather than lots of intensity, higher reps, or higher weight. Give yourself 6-8 weeks of going easy before you try to progress.**

- a. Standing toe raises, free standing or hold on for balance with one or two hands. Do for 15-30 seconds with two feet, then 10-15 seconds on one foot. You will feel fatigue in your calf muscles.
- b. Squat down as if preparing to sit in chair but hold your body just above the sitting surface keeping your back straight. Hold the position for 15-30 seconds. Feel this in your thighs, but no knee pain allowed.
- c. Stand in a lunge position with one foot forward and one back as if taking a large step and hold the position for 15-30 seconds. Start with holding on with at least one hand on a piece of furniture or countertop, or wall. Repeat once for each leg. Feel this in the front and/or back of your thigh, no knee pain allowed.
- d. From standing position, shift weight onto your left foot and press left hand overhead (either no weight in hand or hold a small hammer, can of soup, a shoe or anything ~1-2 pounds), then shift to the right and press right hand overhead, alternate right and left moving slow but steady for 20 reps (no pain in shoulder joint allowed).
- e. From standing position, shift weight onto left leg and press right hand overhead, shift weight onto right leg and press left hand overhead, continue for 20 reps (no pain in shoulder other than mild muscle ache with fatigue that does not last when finished).

- f. From standing position hold light weights (1-2 pounds or no weight) at shoulder level, squat downward partway and while returning upright press both arms overhead at the same time, repeat squat then return upright with overhead press for 10-20 reps.

2. Core Strength

These can be done daily or perhaps 3-5 times per week. Your lower trunk and hips are the anchor point for your arms and legs so good stable strength in this area is essential to be strong in the rest of your body and to prevent and alleviate back and neck pains that are so common. Keep breathing while doing these, though it may be shallow as you hold your trunk muscles tight. As in the other exercises, it is best to do these for time so you focus on the quality vs. quantity of movement and build endurance into these muscles which is how they are wired and how they work best. These muscles deteriorate quickly when you are sedentary.

- a. On back pillow under head, place your arms at your side, lift both bent knees toward your chest, lift and hold your tailbone up off the surface slightly. Keep breathing, and hold this position for 10-30 seconds feeling work in the lower abdominals. This should not hurt in your back or neck and just feel like some work. Repeat 3-6 reps.
- b. On back, knees bent with feet flat, bridge or boost seat upward with a straight spine and hold position 10-30 seconds feeling work in back of thighs, buttocks, and lower back. No pain in back, just muscles working. Repeat 3-6 reps.
- c. Lie on your left side, doubled pillow under head, lift straight right leg sideways toward the ceiling and hold for 10-30 seconds, feeling muscle working on side of right hip. Repeat 3-6 reps, then roll onto your right side and do the same lifting the left leg.
- d. On your stomach, over a pillow under abdomen and chest if more comfortable, extend arms forward and lift arms and chest simultaneously with legs like "Superman!" which is the common name for this exercise. Keep breathing and hold position for 10-30 seconds, repeat 3-6 times. You should feel your back muscles working, but no pain in legs, back, or neck.
- e. Plank exercises are typically done on the floor as if holding a static push up position balancing on your feet and on your hands with arms straight. This can also be done on your elbows and feet. An easier progression to start with is doing a plank from a standing position with your straight arms or on elbows propped on a sturdy countertop, bathroom vanity, or perhaps on the back or seat of a sofa or bed. With plank exercises you should have a straight back and hold the position for 15-60 seconds while continuing to breathe comfortably. This strengthens the abdominals and front of your hips and torso.

Flexibility

When working on flexibility you should always move relaxed and easy and feel a comfortable painless stretch in the targeted area. Breathe, and concentrate on relaxing the muscle you are stretching and again, keep it painless. Do slow deliberate movements and avoid any bouncing movements. Stretching can be done daily and even twice a day for problem areas.

1. Standing

- a. Slowly bend forward keeping knees straight until you feel a gentle stretch (not a pain) on the back of your thighs. Hold gently and relax with a nice easy stretch for 15-30 seconds.
- b. Place one foot back with a straight knee and one forward with a slightly bent knee and lean into wall feeling a stretch in the calf of the leg that is back. Hold for 15-30 seconds, repeat for other leg.
- c. Standing with feet even with each other and at shoulder width, reach straight overhead with one arm while reaching straight down toward the floor (arm at your side) with the other arm, switch

reaching overhead with the other arm and toward the floor with the other. Repeat 3-5 times each way.

- d. Standing with feet even and at shoulder width, reach straight forward with one straight arm while at the same time reaching backward with the other feeling a rotational stretch through your trunk and upper back.

2. Sitting

- a. While sitting straight, raise your arms straight overhead as if signaling a football touchdown. Then bring your arms down to your sides with your elbows bent and your palms facing outward as if you were in a narrow doorway and you are wiping your hands along the door jamb on either side. Squeeze your elbows down along your sides and hold 15 seconds and relax. Repeat 3 times feeling a stretch along the upper shoulders and side of neck.
- b. Again, sitting straight, straighten one knee at a time and pull your toes back feeling a deep but painless stretch on the back of the thigh and lower leg. Hold for 15 seconds and repeat several times on each leg.
- c. Sit straight at the front edge of a chair with your spine very straight and your feet firmly planted on the floor, fold your arms together and hold them up in a manner level with your shoulders, turn your head (pain free range of motion only) to the left while rotating arms and trunk to the right, then return arms to the center while continuing to look left with your head, repeat several times then do the same thing in the other direction. This should gently loosen tightness in your neck, shoulders and upper back. Again, don't go too far and avoid pain, keep breathing.

3. Lying On Back

- a. Place hands behind thigh, and gently pull single knee to chest. Hold for 15 seconds and repeat several times each leg.
- b. Place hands behind thigh and extend your knee to feel a stretch on the back of your thigh, pull your ankle and toes back toward your face to feel a deeper, yet comfortable stretch in the leg. Hold 15 seconds and repeat several times each leg.