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Health Brief

Staying fit despite winter weather

By Constance Garcia-Barrio

Chill winds and early darkness may tempt us to stay inside nestled in an armchair, but our bodies must move – indoors or outdoors – to remain healthy, said Joanne Fagerstrom, 62, a licensed physical therapist since 1978. “Exercise strengthens your muscles and bones and promotes a sense of well-being,” said Fagerstrom, who says she healed herself from osteoporosis through an exercise regimen she

your shoes can also make walking on ice and snow safer. Trekking poles – available at REI and other sporting goods stores, and online – may help you continue your walking routine.”

When foul weather makes indoor activities the safest choice, you can still stay fit. Many exercises don't require special equipment. “Standing on one leg can improve balance, but make sure you're near a sturdy object that you can hold on to for safety, as needed,” Fagerstrom said. “Gradually increase the time as you stand on each leg.”

A storm may howl outside, but you can work on flexibility, a key component of balance, while you're toasty at home. “Sit in a chair and circle your ankles first in one direction and then in the other,” Fagerstrom said. “That movement helps to keep your ankles flexible and strong.”

Stair climbing is a good way to build up your legs, Fagerstrom points out. “Leg strength has been closely correlated with healthy aging. You can set a goal to climb the steps a number of times each day, and then slowly add more times to challenge yourself.”

If you don't have stairs at home, you can still work toward stronger legs. “Rise from a chair without using your hands,” Fagerstrom said. “This movement requires your legs to do all the work. Another approach is to stand with your fingers lightly touching the kitchen counter for balance, and then do mini-squats. Once again, you're making your legs stronger.”

The winter blahs may creep in after days indoors and threaten to derail your exercise routine, but Fagerstrom suggests ways to meet that challenge. “Let a friend be your exercise buddy and report to him or her each day. You're more likely to stick to your program if you're held accountable. Consider wearing a pedometer to see how many steps you take each day. Adding music may also brighten up your routine.”

With these steps you'll not only stay fit in winter, but you'll be in better shape for spring's outdoor fun.



Milestones file photo

Balance improves with practice and exercises that help build leg muscles.

designed and simple changes to her diet. “There are low-cost and no-cost ways to maintain muscle tone despite frosty weather, and minimize the loss of muscle mass that comes with aging.”

Prep for winter well in advance, Fagerstrom advises. “Try to join an exercise class that has a balance component to help you avoid falls on slippery sidewalks,” she said. “Balance is like a muscle. It improves with consistent practice. Grippers that fit over

Constance Garcia-Barrio is a freelance writer and author of a novel based on African-American history in Philadelphia.