

Doctor says winter exercise vital to health

By Christopher Gaul

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The dark, cold days of winter are upon us and with them may come a reluctance to maintain those good exercise habits that seemed easy enough in the kinder weather of spring, summer and fall.

And, noted Dr. Derek Papp, orthopedic surgeon and sports medicine specialist at Baltimore's Good Samaritan Hospital, "it's certainly not uncommon for people to get down during the winter months because it's darker for longer during the day."

So, there you are. It's cold, grey and bleak outside and you just don't feel like taking that daily walk. Your couch or arm chair seem to be so much more inviting. But, Papp said, if you just stop doing everything altogether, you're going to gain weight and be at risk for other health problems. The metabolism for Baby Boomers isn't what it was in their 20s, he added.

"Get out and go to your nearest mall," Papp advised, "and take your walk there. Don't forget that exercise promotes endorphins in your body which provide a natural way to combat the winter doldrums, so even if you don't feel like going out, you're going to feel a lot better if you do."

Here are some of the specific things you can do to move your exercise indoors, even if it involves a short drive, according to Papp:

? Join a gym. Plan a realistic exercise schedule before you join. Then, find the right exercises for you. If you enjoy biking, try a stationary bike. Jogging? Try a treadmill. Experiment with different settings to challenge yourself. And don't get stuck in a rut. Mix things up by trying out new equipment, such as an elliptical, stair-climber or even a rowing machine. With a physician referral, you can also visit The FIRM, Good Samaritan's fitness center, or others.

? Exercise at home. Buy or rent DVDs for low-impact workouts at home. You don't

need fancy equipment for weight resistance; cans from your pantry will do.

? Walk at a mall. Many malls have special hours for walkers, host group exercise events and have mile markers to help you track your progress.

? Take the stairs. Add fitness to your daily routine by skipping the elevator, especially if it's only a few floors.

? Take a class. Have you always wanted to try yoga or Tai Chi or learn a new dancing style? Winter is a great time to do it. You'll have fun and meet new people while burning calories.

? Buddy up. The best way to stick to a new fitness routine is not to do it alone. Find a partner to walk or exercise with you. It's more fun, and you'll help keep each other motivated.

No matter what you do, be sure to do it safely, though," Papp cautioned.

"It's important not to do too much too fast, especially for older adults. Make sure you start with exercises you know you can do and gradually increase from there. It's also important to stretch and warm up thoroughly, and stay hydrated."

Staying fit during the winter really isn't that hard," Papp said. "Once you take the first step, it gets easier and more rewarding every day. So go ahead, take a break from that couch – and get healthy."