



Small steps to fitness and good health

After overindulging at Christmas it's no surprise that the majority of New Year's resolution revolve around losing weight or being healthier. Often the goals we set ourselves at the beginning of January are unrealistic and, by the end of the month, we have already broken our resolutions numerous times over. The World Health Organisation says the recommended amount of physical activity for people over 60 is 150 minutes a week, the example given is 30 minutes walking or other activity that raises your heart rate five days out of seven. In reality though, as we get older aches and pains, other demands on our time or practical considerations such as bad weather make these things difficult.

So this year, why not take the pressure off and set yourself smaller, more achievable daily or weekly goals that will improve your health and fitness. Here are some ideas to help you get started:

1. Reduce sedentary activity. If you're sitting down watching TV, every half hour you should get up and walk around the house or garden - even get up and make a cup of tea and walk around the kitchen while you're waiting for the kettle to boil. If you have trouble getting out of your seat, work up to it - sit as straight and tall as possible with chin up and shoulders back, then try a couple of minutes at a time moving the feet by touching first heel then toe onto the same spot on the floor - this will aid mobility in the ankle joints.

2. If you drive, are there any shorter journeys you do that you could walk if you gave yourself more time? Or do you have to park right outside the shop or your friend's house - could you park around the corner or on the next street and walk the last bit of the journey?

3. Look for an exercise class in your area. Otago exercises are especially designed to improve balance, flexibility and strength in older adults and classes can be found at various venues around the area. Tai Chi is a great gentle exercise which is also good for strength and balance. Contact your local leisure centre to find out what is available in your area: Sutherland Swimming Pool in Golspie 01408 633437, North Coast Leisure Centre in Bettyhill 01641 521400 or Assynt Leisure in Lochinver 01571 844123.

4. Join a walking group. They are a great way to get fit, meet people and even combine it with other activities such as nature watching or photography. If there aren't any walking groups in your area, why not start your own? Step It Up Highland (01463 729997) co-ordinate many walking groups and are always helpful if you want to set one up in your area.

Any activity is good - just to break the cycle of inactivity, doing something a little bit more than you did before is a step towards feeling fitter and healthier.

For more information about Dementia Friendly Communities and the work we do at the Helmsdale Health and Wellbeing Hub visit