

## September/October 2006 WWURA Newsletter

### Health Notes by Evelyn E. Ames      Overcoming Barriers to Physical Activity!

There are 1440 minutes in every day! Why not schedule 30 minutes each day for physical activity? Most, if not all, of WWURA's members agree that physical activity and exercise contribute to a healthier lifestyle and a desire to be engaged in all sorts of activities. But, and there is a but, barriers do exist that hinder one's desire or ability to be active. Why? This **Health Notes** article addresses some of the barriers and offers suggestions for overcoming them. The content relating to "Personal Barriers" was taken from *Promoting Physical Activity: A Guide for Community Action* (Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity: National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, USDHHS, 1999).

Family and friends significantly influence a person's level of physical activity. Having someone to participate with means one is more likely to go out and do something! The layout of communities (e.g., accessibility and location of parks, trails, sidewalks, and recreational centers; street design and safety; density of housing, and availability of public transit) plays a role in promoting or discouraging an individual's/family's level of physical activity. Environmental barriers from water and air pollution to crime and dangerous automobile traffic can affect one's desire to be physically active. (Sallis and Hovell, 1990; Sallis et al., 1992) found the 10 most common reasons adults cite for not adopting more physically active lifestyles to be the following: not have enough time to exercise; find it inconvenient to exercise; lack of self-motivation; do not find exercise enjoyable; find exercise boring; lack confidence in ability to be physically active; fear being injured or have been injured recently; lack ability to set personal goals, monitor progress, or reward progress toward such goals; lack encouragement, support, or companionship from family and friends; and do not have parks, sidewalks, bicycle trails, or safe and pleasant walking paths convenient to homes or offices.

#### A Few Suggestions for Overcoming Personal Barriers to Physical Activity

1. Explain your interest in physical activity to friends and family. Ask for their support. Plan social activities that involve exercise. Develop new friendships with physically active people.
2. Schedule physical activity for times in the day or week when you feel energetic.
3. Make physical activity a regular part of your daily or weekly schedule and write it on your calendar.
4. Learn how to exercise appropriately considering your age, fitness level, skill level, and health status.
5. Select activities requiring no new skills, such as walking, climbing stairs, or jogging. Exercise with friends who are at the same skill level as you are. Take a class to learn new skills.
6. Select activities that require minimal facilities or equipment.
7. Develop a set of regular activities that you can do regardless of weather conditions (and besides, rain doesn't stop us in the northwest!).
8. When traveling, put a jump rope or flex band in your suitcase. Walk the halls and climb the stairs in hotels.
9. Use a sensible approach if you are starting to be physically activity (e.g., choose activities you enjoy and are not too strenuous) and gradually build up the time and intensity to complete the recommended 30 minutes a day. P.S. Gardening is a physical activity! Check this site at the National Institute on Aging for more info: <http://www.niapublications.org/exercisebook/exercisebook.asp>.

One interesting piece of information to share with you: researchers (University of Arizona and in Great Britain) are finding evidence that physical activity (approximately 30 minutes a day) lessens the dosage prescribed for people medicated with antidepressants. For some subjects, physical activity is the preferred prescription for treating depression.