

Healthy Living and Being Active

Research confirms that being active adds years to our life expectancy and improves our mental health and quality of life. As Minister responsible for Seniors, as well as Minister of Healthy Living, this is a topic I am truly enthusiastic about. I have personally committed to getting active by finding activities that fit my busy schedule and my interests. In fact, I trained hard and ran a half marathon last year for the first time. What a boost to my energy level and my confidence.

Our health is an important daily consideration, especially as we age. As we go through physical changes, we may also be dealing with chronic conditions that can limit activities and even threaten our independence. In spite of this, we can still focus on being fit and the best we can be. It's all relative because being physically active means different things to different people. So, if going to the gym is not your cup of tea, find something that you do enjoy. That way, you'll be more likely to stick with it.

Here are some activities to consider. Go walking. There are plenty of walking trails throughout Manitoba. Enjoy the outdoors and the sunshine at the same time. Get gardening. It's that season again, so plant, rake and get active doing yard work. Take classes. Many communities and seniors' centres offer classes such as yoga, chair exercises, swimming, Tai Chi and dance classes for couples or singles. Or, how about signing up for that belly dancing class you always wanted to try?

There may also be a Steppin' Up or Steppin' Out With Confidence fitness program near you. Steppin' Up is a group exercise class and Steppin' Out is a walking class. Both programs are for seniors and are led by senior instructors. Classes are free and offered at such places as seniors housing complexes and seniors clubs. What a great way to meet people and get fit. Both programs are co-ordinated by the Active Living Coalition of Active Manitobans. To learn more, or volunteer to be a leader, call the Seniors Information Line.

If you have grandchildren or young children in your neighbourhood, why not take them to the park, get on the swings and go down the slide? You could go swimming or ride bikes together. Try a nature walk and observe the flowers blooming and the trees in bud. Or, you could show them how to play hopscotch on the patio.

Canada's *Physical Activity Guide for Older Adults* recommends that older adults get 30 to 60 minutes of moderate physical activity most days. The good news is, these minutes can be added up in 10-minute segments throughout the day. You can start slowly — even five minutes at a time provides benefits. Then, you can gradually increase the time and intensity in the coming weeks and months. The more you move, the better you will start to feel. Try to participate in a variety of activities that improve endurance, strength and flexibility. Each of these plays a role in your health and well-being. For more information and activity ideas visit www.manitobainmotion.ca.

I'm proud of the progress I have made towards my fitness goals. I feel great and I am looking forward to future physical challenges. Who knows, I may even run a full marathon! What will your physical challenge be for this year?

As always, I also invite you to call the Seniors Information Line with any comments or questions regarding the Steppin' Up or Steppin' Out program, or any other seniors' issue, at 945-6565 in Winnipeg; toll free 1-800-665-6565; or visit www.gov.mb.ca/shas.

Kerri Irvin-Ross
Minister responsible for Seniors

The Manitoba Age Friendly Initiative supports active living

- While embracing active living, concerns about safety, accessibility and functionality can become issues. They can affect physical activity opportunities within a community. For example: sidewalks that have obstacles or uneven surfaces make walking difficult and unsafe.
- Many of these issues are being addressed by the Manitoba Age Friendly Initiative (AFMI).
- AFMI encourages communities to support seniors in leading active, independent lives that contribute to healthy aging.
- Currently, 29 Manitoba communities are participating in the initiative and are working together to improve the quality of life for people of all ages who live there. For more information visit www.gov.mb.ca/shas or call the Seniors Information Line.