



Getting in *shape* for Summer

As the weather gets warmer and the days get longer, we all happily anticipate the barbeques, picnics and days spent lazing at the beach. Many of us also start thinking about our bodies that we have neglected and covered up all winter long, writes NALISHA PATEL.

If you had slipped up a little in your activity and eating habits over the winter, do not panic just yet. Summer is a great time to kick-start your health and fitness routine. Try a few of the suggestions below to introduce some fun and new activities.

Workout outside

Where better to work out than at your local beach or park? Brisk walking along the sand requires a greater effort than walking on a usual hard surface. Your muscles and tendons will work harder as you stabilise yourself on the sand as you walk.

Walking in sand requires 2.1 to 2.7 times more energy than walking on hard surfaces and jogging in sand uses 1.6 times more energy.

Another benefit of walking on a beach is that you will use 20 to 50 per cent more calories than you would walking at the same pace on a hard surface.

For a short stroll down the beach, bare feet are fine, but if you are going to walk briskly for an exercise routine, make sure you have the correct walking shoes to avoid injury.

If you are starting to get bored of your usual gym or home weights routine, start using park equipment to help revitalise your workout. Many whole body exercises can be done with just your body weight and can include a park bench. Enlist the help of a trainer for some workout ideas if you get stuck.

Prepare for outdoor activities by always wearing a hat, packing a water bottle and slapping on sunscreen.

Start swimming

As the weather gets warmer, you will find it easier to want to start swimming. Head to your local pools or even the beach and start paddling away. Swimming is an excellent activity to try if you are new to exercise. It works your whole body, improving cardiovascular health, endurance, muscle strength and flexibility all at the same time. As you get fitter, you can cover more distance. As you are building up, your body and mind will greatly benefit. Vary your routine to include backstroke and breaststroke. Most pools run classes on swimming if you need any additional help on technique.

Be more adventurous

Summer is the perfect time to try some activities you have always thought of doing but had never got around to.

If you are up for a challenge, head to an indoor rock-climbing centre and get going! Rock-climbing is a great activity to work on your upper body strength, your confidence and also help with stress release as you can't focus on climbing and problems!

If you prefer to be outdoors, try kayaking. This also is great for building upper body strength. Join up with a friend and make a fun day of it.

Another great option for mixing fun and fitness is rollerblading. You can buy some inexpensive blades from sport shops or hire them out. Rollerblading is fantastic for lower body strength, core and stability. It can really get your heart rate up and increase your fitness in a fun way if you make it a consistent exercise.

Rollerblading is gentler than running and has less impact on your joints. It can really work your legs, butt, hips and thighs. If you swing

your arms while skating, your upper body can also benefit.

Go for a hike

Hit the outdoors with a group of friends and go for a hike at a local or regional park. If you want more adventure, organise an overnight or extended visit to a park and camp out. Hiking is a great workout for your cardiovascular system. If you enjoy what you are doing, you are more likely to stick at it and see the results. Hiking also brings the therapeutic benefit of being good for you mentally, as does walking. Being in the fresh air, either alone or with friends does wonders for stress and therefore for your health and well-being. If you are new to exercise, start slowly and build up from there. Hiking or walking is great for a beginner as you can do it at your own pace and still get benefits.

Make sure you pack plenty of water and snacks. Stay nice and cool by sticking to shady spots and pace yourself so you still enjoy the walk and view.

Reassess your eating habits

Firstly, remember to eat throughout the day! It is easy in summer to feel less hungry and almost forget to eat with the increase in activity levels and warmer weather. It is important to eat five small meals each day to keep your blood sugar levels constant and your energy levels high. It may be tempting to reduce your food intake to lose weight rapidly if you start panicking about swimsuit season.

Remember that it is important to eat consistently throughout the day so you lose weight gradually and keep it off long term. The more you enjoy the changes you are making over the summer, the more likely you are to stick at the changes long term so you are at your best all year round!

Take advantage of the great weather and eat outside. Pack your lunch each day so you know exactly what you are eating. Avoid buying out everyday as most convenient foods are packed with extra calories you can do without. Studies have shown that cutting down on just one can of soda can help you to lose five to seven kilos per year! Start by looking at what you are eating and where you can start to make some changes.

Train for fun runs or local events

If you need an extra push or motivation to start working out, hunt out a fun run or local event to help keep you on track. These types of events often have a training schedule that you can follow or you can start easing into walking and running and then working on your resistance training to supplement your cardio. If you are in any doubt on how to train, always consult an exercise professional for guidance.

Getting into shape for the summer and beyond does not have to be all hard work, but it does take effort and commitment. If you are enjoying what you are doing, then you will stick at it and see the results. Try to focus on the long term benefits and you will be set for the rest of the year!

▲ Nalisha Patel of HealthMastery, specialises in personal training in the home or office, with 12-week challenges for health and fitness, weight-loss and healthy mindsets. www.healthmastery.co.nz