

Many young people seem obsessed with physical fitness and are happy to pay big fees for a local gym, or buy expensive exercise machines to use at home. For those of us of more mature years this may seem 'over the top' and we may be more concerned with keeping our minds active. But which is most beneficial, sitting in an easy chair puzzling over a crossword or walking to the post box? If you are sending off the correct solution to the crossword in order to win a prize then both are essential!

Keeping Mobile in Old Age

Kathleen Charles

Reading, thinking, resting and exercising are all important to our general well being. Keeping active and mobile as we grow older is not only physically beneficial but also improves our mental state. Unless a debilitating condition is present, physical exercise maintains muscle strength and flexibility of joints. Physical activity can lift the spirits and may give some relief from pain or a problem because we are diverted. Standing and moving about, even for a short while, aids the circulation as gastrocnemius (the calf muscle) acts as a pump to return blood to the heart. Good posture can aid breathing and lung capacity and therefore increase resistance to infection. Paul wrote, "for bodily exercise profits a little" (1Tim 4:8).

A daily walk in the fresh air is good for body and soul; indeed walking is the best general exercise, maintaining strength and joint mobility. It also has a beneficial effect on circulation, lung capacity and the internal plumbing system. Even someone who cannot walk far will benefit from regular exercise. It is important not to 'shuffle' along but have a good 'heel-toe' gait which ensures a contraction

... bodily exercise profits a little

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of the calf muscle. To avoid the 'shuffle gait' accentuate the heel touching the ground first not the whole foot and then give a good push off using the toes of the back foot. Keep an even speed with good length steps, maintaining a relaxed upright posture. Singing hymns to yourself is an aid to good rhythm and is encouraging too.

If you are too busy for a walk then go into the garden or just open the window and breathe deeply in order to get fresh air down into the bottom of your lungs. Occasionally have a good stretch of your limbs and spine, and when gardening vary the task, to prevent stiffness. Wear shoes for part of each day even if you do not go outside; slippers should not be worn all the time. Elastic shoelaces and a long handled shoehorn can be a help for some people when putting on their shoes. Keeping up the strength in our legs should prevent getting in and out of chairs and awkward things like cars and baths becoming a problem. Should getting up from a chair be difficult, tuck your feet well back and bend your body forward, then with your hands on the arms of the chair rock to and fro before standing up.

Conquering pride to go further

People worry that using an aid of some kind shows weakness, and pride can be a barrier too. Hopefully

Christians can conquer their pride! A smart looking walking stick in the correct hand may enable you to walk that extra mile which in turn strengthens the muscles, burns up the calories and cheers the spirit. The stick should be held in the opposite hand to the weaker leg. This divides the body weight between the weak leg and the stick and keeps the centre of gravity low and between the legs. If the stick is on the wrong side undue strain is put on other joints and the back. A stick of the right height should reach to the wrist joint when the arm is beside the body. Walking sticks come in all shapes and sizes. Aluminium sticks with straight



handles are sturdy and adjustable giving a light but strong support. However wooden sticks with curved or straight handles are more appealing. Shaped handles are excellent for people with weak or arthritic hands, but it is important to purchase the appropriate one for a right or a left hand.

To be of benefit all exercise regimes need some commitment. The only way that muscles will get stronger is by use and that means effort. "Use it or lose it" is a true saying. Even the most immobile can be helped by joining an exercise group supervised by a suitably qualified and experienced person. However, exercises performed once a week will not strengthen anything; the aim of a class is to give you the ideas and ability to exercise at other times, building up strength and increasing mobility. So do not complain next time you have to go back upstairs because you forgot something, think positively – it was good exercise!

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Kathleen Charles qualified as a physiotherapist at the Middlesex Hospital where she worked before 'retiring' to bring up her family.

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