

**The hardest part is taking the first step...**  
**Take the “Step Challenge Plus” to stay fit for life!**  
**by Ryan and Joanna Sleik**

If there was one thing you could do to help prevent or control heart disease, diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, and arthritis would you do it? What if it could make you look and feel younger? Would you do it if it was free? Of course you would. But did you know that one third of youth and adults in Canada have one or more of these chronic health conditions, and that approximately 23% of Canadian adults are clinically obese and 59% are overweight? The problem is that fewer than 25% of those who attempt to lose weight incorporate exercise into their weight loss plan. Inactivity is a growing and reversible problem and physiotherapists are determined to help!

The problem with getting out there and getting active is that exercise can be a lot of work! You may have difficulty finding the time, may have limitations following an injury or as a result of a chronic health condition or may not even know where to start. In recognition of National Physiotherapy Month (April 22-May 9) the Canadian Physiotherapy Association is advocating the **Step Challenge Plus** to help you get started. Research has shown that taking 10,000 steps/day has significant health benefits. Depending on your pace, 10,000 steps is only a 30-60 minute walk! That could include taking your four-legged friend for a daily stroll, walking to school or work or during your lunch hour. Exercising in a group or with others can also help with motivation and enjoyment. Living in a small community, we are fortunate that we have a large variety of group activities to suit almost all interests and schedules. For instance, if you feel that walking may be too hard on your joints the community pools in Cranbrook and Kimberley offer aqua-aerobics and therapeutic exercise classes. If the weather is inclement (like it has been this spring) you can walk in the RecPlex, or perhaps you might want to join a local gym. For those who are a little more adventuresome consider joining a local running, cycling or triathlon club or try the rock-climbing wall at the College of the Rockies. Over the past thirty years, the Bigfoot Running Club in Cranbrook has been hosting monthly races and currently has over 40 members. If running is not your thing, how about joining a shinny hockey team, playing volleyball or badminton on the weekends or walking the golf course instead of using a cart. Recent research has shown that exercise does not need to be strenuous. Even yoga, tai chi, and dancing are all excellent ways to keep your bones, muscles, and heart strong as well as reduce stress, blood pressure, and improve overall wellbeing.

After paying a little closer attention to community bulletins and local clubs I realized that there are far too many activities in our region to even begin to list! Watch community event bulletins in the paper and news advertiser. Often hikes, charity events, or races are posted in the papers. Look for seasonal community activity guides that indicate meeting times, special events, and beginner classes for different activities. If you are looking for specific classes such as yoga or pilates, check with one of the local gyms and see what they have to offer. Finally, ask your friends and see what they

do. Group exercise has a higher level of adherence and can be more fun to participate in if you are a person who needs a little push to take that first step out the door.

Always consider that exercising should feel good and should always be performed within your limits. If you are not sure if your health will allow a certain activity, check with your family doctor prior to beginning a new activity and use your own good judgment. If you have a chronic health condition or injury that could interfere with increasing your activity level, speak with your physiotherapist about ways to remove these potential barriers and provide suggestions or safe and appropriate activities to keep you moving. After remembering the 151 smog days we had during our last year living in Hamilton Ontario, my wife and I are reminded each day that we live in a beautiful area and are lucky to have so many activities and opportunities within our reach. I hope to see you out there! Have fun and stay fit for life!