

Staying active contributes to healthy holidays

K-State's Jackson offers tips for exercising when the weather turns cold

Cold, winter days can often lead to thoughts of curling up under a blanket, kicking back on the couch, and putting on your favorite holiday shows.

Indeed, it can be a wonderful life.

But K-State Research and Extension family and consumer sciences specialist Sharolyn Jackson says that enjoying the season to the fullest should also include keeping yourself active and healthy.

“As we look at options for staying active in the winter months, the one thing that is a common theme is that it’s a conscious choice that you make,” Jackson said. “It’s not just going to happen. We are creatures that want to hibernate, so it’s a conscious choice to stay active in the winter months.

“It doesn’t mean that you have to go to a gym and have a really heavy workout. It’s just building activity into your entire day. We’ve done a really good job of engineering regular physical activity out of our day.”

The physical activity guidelines for adults suggest 150 minutes a week of moderate intensity, or 30 minutes five days each week. Weather conditions may prevent some from fully meeting that goal, but every little bit helps.

“A 10- or 15-minute walk is good, too, if that’s all you can get,” Jackson said. “Make the time to go for a good, brisk walk outdoors. You’re going to walk a little more quickly, perhaps, when you’re outside and it’s cold.”

When it’s snowing, kids love to be out in the snow. “As adults, we need to take that cue and go join them for a little bit,” said Jackson, who also suggests using outdoor chores such as raking leaves or removing snow as good activities that keep you moving and healthy.

“It’s very healthy to be outside, but just be prepared for it,” she said. “Dress in layers, paying attention to your hands, feet and face. The outer layer needs to protect you from the wind and moisture. If it’s really cold and you’re really uncomfortable, it’s probably not a very good idea to be out there, but we get a lot of days in Kansas where it’s a little chilly and not too bad.”

Jackson said there are also many opportunities to be active indoors.

“The three things you should focus on are strength, flexibility and balance,” she said. Strengthening and stretching exercises can be pretty simple, either with specialized equipment or using body weight. You can also do arm curls with cans of vegetables while watching TV, or buy resistance bands and follow the diagrams that come with the packaging.

Small jumps, or hops, around the home – jump rope, anyone? – help to build bone strength. Simple hops may feel silly for adults to do, but you can be creative to do what works for you.

“For balance, simple things can help,” Jackson said. “When brushing your teeth or washing the dishes, stand on one foot. That builds strength and balance.”

She also suggested a wide-leg squat, standing up and sitting down, while watching TV or talking with family.

“You’re never too young and never too old to do these exercises,” Jackson said. “You can start to add any type of activity, strengthening or stretching at any point in your lifetime, at a level that is appropriate for you.”

Jackson recommends a K-State Research and Extension program, [Stay Strong, Stay Healthy](#), as one way to stay active with a support group. The eight-week program helps older adults build appropriate muscle strength, and is offered in many counties in Kansas.

[Contact your local extension agent](#) to ask if the program is offered where you live.

Jackson also is the statewide director of [Walk Kansas](#), an eight-week program that encourages teams of Kansans to get together and walk the equivalent distance of the state of Kansas. The popular program runs from March 15 to May 9 in the coming year.

“Social support is huge,” Jackson said. “We are seeing that in both of these programs. The social connection and the support to be more active is a huge motivating factor.”