Warm temps boost drive to exercise, but what about when it gets colder?

K-State’s Jackson shares tips for staying motivated during winter months

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Warmer temperatures across much of Kansas have paved the way for many to take in a brisk walk, run, bike ride or other outdoor activity.

K-State Research and Extension’s northeast area specialist Sharolyn Jackson doesn’t want to put a damper on the good times, but she knows that colder days are likely ahead. And she’s hoping that Kansans will continue to get out and move even when the temperatures begin to drop.

“It’s challenging for people to exercise regularly any time of the year, but it’s especially so in the winter months if you like to do things outdoors,” she said.

Jackson is coordinator of the statewide Walk Kansas program, an eight-week team challenge offered each spring. She’s also been one of the key forces in K-State’s Living Well Together program, a weekly online one-hour series aimed to get people moving during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Staying active outside often starts with “your ‘why’ for physical activity,” according to Jackson.

“They ‘why’ is your goal,” she said. “We know that physical activity helps us maintain a healthier lifestyle and build a healthier body, but if our goal for doing that is we want to lose weight or have better numbers at our health check…well, that’s not particularly motivating.”

Instead, believing that exercise can help you feel better right now can be the boost you need to get outdoors and move – even when it’s cold.

“What we do know about physical activity is that you do feel better right away,” Jackson said. “That’s probably where you want to focus, rather than thinking only about what’s down the road.”
Jackson said exercising in cold weather should include dressing in layers, typically with a moisture-wicking material closest to the body, and a jacket or other material that will guard against wind and cold for the outer-most layer.

She also suggests protecting the hands, head and feet, perhaps wearing an extra pair of socks.

“One of the things you can do in the fall and winter months is take a nature walk,” Jackson said. “Stroll around the neighborhoods or parks and rather than focus on physical activity, think about the changes of color in the seasons, or the different sounds you hear. It changes your focus to enjoy nature rather than just exercising to be healthy. It gives you a different sense of appreciation.”

When it’s not possible to get outside, Jackson said you can still exercise indoors.

“If you have stairs in your house, walking up and down them several times can be really good exercise,” she said. “If you’re watching TV or working on a computer…pick up hand weights and work those. Do squats while you’re watching a zoom meeting.

“There are a lot of things you can do to change the mindset of just sitting in your chair. Ask yourself, ‘what can I do in my space?’”

K-State Research and Extension offers numerous programs for Kansans to get together with others to exercise, both indoors and outdoors. Jackson noted that many communities offer the programs Stay Strong, Stay Healthy (which promotes strength training to older adults), and Walk With Ease (which is aimed at people who are sedentary or those who are experiencing problems due to arthritis).

For more information on programs offered in your community, contact your local extension office.

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Walk Kansas, www.walkkansas.org

Living Well Wednesday, www.ksre.k-state.edu/fcs/livingwellwed/livewellwed.html

Stay Strong, Stay Healthy, www.k-state.edu/staystrong

K-State Research and Extension statewide offices, www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations.html

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