

By BETTY CUNIBERTI

Against the advice of every friend who appeared to have more than a dozen brain cells, I took an early retirement buyout from my job as a columnist for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch a year or so ago. But what could I do with these golden years to justify throwing in the towel a decade early? I needed GOALS!

The first that sprung to mind is the usual one - getting into a regular exercise routine so I might not drop dead before Social Security kicks in.

How about joining a fitness club? The experts advise us to go to the gym several times a week. But the thought of running thousands of miles on a treadmill to nowhere, lost in a vast, sweaty sea of flat-bellied 30-somethings fills me with inspiration to move quickly to the next goal. Besides, well-intentioned folks my age who think they can do the physically challenging stuff they did when they were 25 are injuring themselves in record numbers. And now we're lining up for knee and hip replacements and surgery to repair the damage.

And let's be clear: it's not just that running or doing aerobics will rip an old fogey's knees or back to shreds. It will also drive us stark raving bananas, and we'll quit. One time I signed up for an exercise class and never went at all. Fitness centers that require memberships make big, big money off well-intentioned no-shows like me.

WHAT REALLY CHANGED MY LIFE. I read an article about a 63-year-old gentleman who, after nine months of a fitness program that involves only one 20-minute strengthtraining session a week, broke par for the first time.

In a flash, it all came together - my aging body that once turned heads and now turned stomachs, my passion for golf, my need to exercise regularly or die, my hatred of exercise classes, and well, exercise. But 20 minutes a week of something that even old folks with pain issues can do? So, I went to the 20 Minutes to Fitness studio in Clayton, Mo. There was not one treadmill or stationary bicycle. A Personal Trainer took a detailed health and fitness history and explained the studio's use of a revolutionary fitness technique known as slow cadence, high intensity strength training.

Especially for people over 40, the key to fitness is replacing lost muscle without damaging fragile joints or ligaments. 20 Minutes to Fitness is a smart, safe way to do just that. A big reason is its highly specialized equipment. Originally developed for spine care and osteoporosis, the machines are calibrated to work specific muscle groups without putting stress on joints, bones and ligaments.

You get your own personal trainer and then there's the time factor. If someone were to calculate and compare muscles per minute per dollar, 20 Minutes would blow everybody's doors off. The brief workout takes muscles to failure, which triggers a signal to the body to build new muscle. This rebuilding requires four to six days of rest, similar to the time between starts of a baseball pitcher. During this time the body is using an astounding amount of energy (burning calories) to rebuild muscle. The more calories you burn, the faster you deplete your stored body fat. Blood pressure goes down and bone density is increased. The risk of diabetes is cut.

With my trainer at my side, directing and charting every workout, my body was literally transformed. My back pain went away and my strength seemed to increase overnight. I'm in the best shape of my life and feel like I've reversed the aging process. I never dreamed that at 55, I'd hit the ball this far or wear my golf skirts this short. AND, I went from a size 10 to a size 6!

Somewhere around here is a teeny, tiny word that says, "advertisement." I am being compensated for these words. But there's enough journalist in me that you couldn't pay me enough to lie. I want to share my success because I think it can be a life-changing experience for many kinds of people - those too busy to exercise, or think they're too old, or too out of shape, have too many medical problems, or just plain hate exercising.

How Betty got her Groove Back



MINUTES TO FITNESS

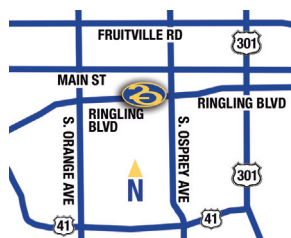
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LAKEWOOD RANCH

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DOWNTOWN

1753 Ringling Boulevard, Sarasota
941.361.1000

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