

Staying Active While Staying At Home

By Patrick Wade, KT Staff Writer

It is tough to get moving when you are ordered to stay at home, but with millions of Americans sequestered during the COVID-19 global pandemic, it may be more important now than ever to stay active. Of course, that means you might have to modify your workout a bit, but kinesiologists say that staying active through challenging times is important for everyone's physical and mental well-being.

That is especially true for children who get a majority of their activity from physical education classes and after-school sports. "I think they're going through the same thing we're going through. Maybe a little more magnified for them because they're kids," said Cindy Kuhrasch the Physical Education Teacher Program Coordinator in the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Kuhrasch said that kids' lives have been shrunk down to one area – their homes. They are probably missing their friends, missing their teachers, missing their church communities and missing their coaches. "It's just like everyone else," Kuhrasch said.

For physical educators, trainers and coaches, it is important to provide parents

with resources to keep their children active at home, Kuhrasch said. And while parents may feel a lot of pressure to fill those voids, they do not necessarily need to be a teacher for their kids – just a playmate. "Just talk to your kids about it and play with them," Kuhrasch said. "Enter the activity as a playmate instead of having this weight on your shoulders as a teacher."

Kuhrasch has tried to assist in this process by posting a series of "P.E. At Home" videos on YouTube. They cover topics such as batting a balloon back and forth with a partner, striking bubbles with a flyswatter, and playing a classic game of 500 by throwing a ball up on the roof and catching it when it rolls off. "We're so limited right now because we're all just having to be home with each other," Kuhrasch said. "But I do think that incorporating play into our time together is going to reduce some of this anxiety we're feeling and this cabin fever."

The games Kuhrasch recommends are not simply intended to be playful – they have an educational purpose. Kids are kinesthetic learners, she says, and the movement during play helps them enter a three-dimensional space where they learn

about their bodies. Children learn about balance by being on a bike, for example. Physical movement enhances cognitive learning, she said. There is also a strong social component to play. By playing with a friend, brother, sister or parent, you can add a social component to physical activity at home.

Staying active is important for adults too. The physical benefits are obvious, but the mental health benefits are also hugely important while lives are being significantly disrupted. "Humans were built to move," said John Mercer, professor and acting chair of the Department of Kinesiology and Nutrition Sciences at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. "So continuing to move during the stay-at-home recommendations is important." With many gyms and fitness centers closed during the pandemic, that can be difficult.

"Fortunately, there are a lot of creative ways that I am seeing people use to be active while following the social distance concept," Mercer said. "People are accessing YouTube exercise routine videos, sharing exercise ideas on social media platforms, and fitness gyms are offering online exercise

classes that you do in your home. There are also different software programs like Zwift and Rouvy that allow cyclists to connect their indoor bike trainers to the internet in a way that people can train and race each other – but while in their own home.”

The changes in workout routines for many may be a disruption to their social interactions. Working out with a friend, walking with a group of people or going to a yoga class may be a big piece of someone’s day that has been eliminated. But there are some interesting tech-based solutions there as well – web-based platforms like Strava and Garmin Connect help users share their workouts with a social group. “Programs like these are in essence Facebook for endurance athletes and can be helpful to stay motivated to exercise,” Mercer said.

One of the unique aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic is how quickly it has changed our lives, Mercer said. In just a matter of weeks, people are now working remotely or have lost their jobs. Some may have left their jobs to take care of children who cannot go to school. In a rapidly changing world, exercise may offer some mental relief and maybe a distraction from the news. “Regular schedules have changed so rapidly for so many – it is important to recalibrate and create a sense structure,”

Mercer said. “Exercise can play a role in providing that structure.”

The benefits of physical activity are well-documented, and he says there are a lot of online resources with ideas to get people moving inside their homes. “I see people being creative and using cans of food or bottles of water for weights,” he said. “Any type of movement that you can do for even 10 minutes that increases how fast your heart is beating is good physical activity.”

It is important to remember that the exercise does not need to be extremely hard and physically exhausting. It is more important to get regular physical activity throughout the week, Mercer said, instead of trying to be a “weekend warrior” and only exercising hard for one or two days per week. This could also be an opportunity to try something new or try something for which you previously did not have the time.

“Many people who were regularly exercising are struggling to find the motivation to continue with exercise now that their goal event has been cancelled or postponed,” Mercer said. “It is important that these people take the time to recover from their regular training plan and recalibrate their approach to regular exercise.”

PE At Home YouTube videos:
<http://bit.ly/PEathome>



Cindy Kuhrasch, the Physical Education Teacher Program Coordinator at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is shown in one of her YouTube videos demonstrating a game she calls “Backward Hangman.” Kuhrasch has published a series of videos depicting games that children can play at home to stay active while schools are closed.

The American College of Sport Medicine (ACSM), a leading authority on exercise, has provided some ideas about how to exercise at home.

<https://www.acsm.org/read-research/newsroom/news-releases/news-detail/2020/03/16/staying-physically-active-during-covid-19-pandemic>