



Slow Down But Never Give Up Exercising

When Title IX passed in 1972, I was 10 years old. It didn't mean much in my small Indiana town — girls still couldn't play Little League and there were few school sports teams — but in my teens, my parents did agree to let me study martial arts alongside my brother. I was part of the '70s' running boom, and in the '80s, I "felt the burn" with Jane Fonda. In grad school I ran and lifted weights just to relieve stress. As I got older, I took up walking and yoga. Honestly, I've exercised most of my adult life — just not day to day or year to year with any consistency.

Four years ago, after another long, lazy break, I decided to get back in shape, so I hired a personal trainer for my 50th birthday. While I had been devoted to my yoga class, I knew I needed to do a lot more. My trainer soon had me working on my core, strength training, and ramping up my cardio. Before I knew it, I had joined the YMCA Endurance Program. Running three times a week with like-minded folks, under the guidance of encouraging coaches, was life changing. I soon added cross-training — swimming, rowing, weightlifting. My idea of a relaxing weekend meant going on a hike, hooping in the park, maybe running a 5K — for fun. I even ran a half-marathon. My life revolved around physical activity and I was in the best condition of my life.

And then things started falling apart. For the past two years, something has been going on, but no one could tell me exactly what. Muscle weakness, joint pain, incapacitating fatigue, headaches, vertigo. The list seemed endless. And so, one by one, the physical activities I loved dropped away.

What I see now, as I slowly work my way back to fitness with the help of a new doctor and a new personal trainer, and finally a

correct diagnosis, is that I shouldn't have given up exercise when my health took a nose dive. In fact, staying active might have mitigated some of the more debilitating symptoms I was experiencing. At one point it became obvious that I had to stop running, but there was no reason I couldn't have taken up walking, even if it was slowly and for shorter distances. Swimming might have been more difficult, but not impossible. In fact, the water may have soothed my aching joints and muscles. And while some of the more strenuous yoga poses were beyond my capability, my yoga teachers are always mindful of their students' needs for modifications. Instead of skipping class, I should have gone on those bad days and done whatever I could, taking advantage of the camaraderie and support of being with my yoga classmates.

For whatever reason — age, injury, disability — each of us will most likely have to make some compromise along our fitness journey. But we shouldn't ever give up. Whatever you love doing, there is an alternative. If you can't run, you can walk. If you can't play tennis, well, there's always pickleball. (I really want to give that a try.) The most important thing is to keep moving. As one of my most influential running coaches always reminds us, it doesn't matter how you get there. What matters is that you keep putting one foot in front of the other. ✨

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