

FIT FOR LIFE with Carol Westmorland

Why getting on your bike is the perfect exercise

Has the gorgeous spring weather put you in the mood to exercise? Well, I am going to look at outdoor activities and inspire you to take action beginning with my passion; cycling.

A 30-minute bike ride to and from work five times a week burns off the equivalent of 22lbs of fat in a year – and when one pound of fat is 3,500 calories that is a staggering amount.

The heavy breathing experienced after a few minutes of cycling increases the intake of oxygen, making it a very effective aerobic exercise.

The fat melts away and is replaced by muscle, which in turn burns energy even when at rest, and if you want proof of that try touching – with permission – the quads of a cyclist (that's the muscle at the front of the thigh).

Studies show that cycling is one of the few exercises that can help reduce cellulite from the thigh region. This is because cycling facilitates blood circulation throughout the body, carrying oxygen-rich blood to all the muscles thus reducing the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity and the most common form of diabetes.

Cycling also has a positive effect on how we feel. Moderate exercise outdoors has been found to reduce levels of depression and stress, improve mood and raise self-esteem, and has also been found to relieve the symptoms of premenstrual syndrome.

There can also be indirect benefits in



terms of reducing injuries. The strength and co-ordination that regular cycling brings make them less likely. A study carried out for the Department of Transport found that, "even a small amount of cycling can lead to significant gains in fitness".

The study found that aerobic fitness was boosted by 17 per cent after just six weeks of cycling four miles to work and back each day.

In the same study it was found that people not used to exercise who start cycling, move from the least fit third of the population, to the fittest half of the population in just a few months.

Leg strength also improved in the cyclists in the study. Cycling, the researchers behind the study concluded, is "one of the few physical activities that can be undertaken by the majority of the population as part of a daily routine".

There are no age barriers to cycling, as my family can testify. What sets cycling apart from most other forms of exercise is how well it fits into our busy day and is proven to add quality of life.

■ How many hours of the following activities would it take to lose one pound of body fat?

Cycling – 2.5 hours; swimming – 4.5 hours; hiking – 5 hours; aerobics – 6 hours

Carol Westmorland lives in the Eden Valley. She is a Cycling Time Trials national champion, clocking up 445 miles in 24 hours. She also teaches pilates. www.pilates-cumbria.co.uk

LIFE COACH with Marion Dunlop

Surviving recession: we'll come through this!

No-one is immune to the present economic situation – mortgages, savings, pensions and industry. The list goes on and most of us are involved in some way.

If you're at risk of losing your job then it can feel scary. We went through it ourselves when we had a young family. It was frightening at the time but, looking back on it, we learned some good lessons for life.

We learned to be flexible – nothing in life is fixed and secure.

We learned to buy what we needed, not what other people think they can sell us. We respected the need to recycle, to buy second hand, and to make do.

The main lesson we learned was to

trust that it would be OK. As long as we were all healthy we could take on any challenge, learn from it and find other work if we were flexible enough.

We had to move to a completely new area a few times and start again. We survived and have used the experience to keep an open mind when things get tough.

I'm not pretending it was easy – it wasn't. However we realised that being together and having any job that kept a roof over our heads was far more important than material things, or staying put in one area.

If you begin to doubt yourself then focus on what you have and what you

are capable of achieving.

Avoid the negativity of other people's opinions on the situation – don't listen to the news or economics programmes if they reduce your confidence.

Instead focus on your strengths, think flexibly about reducing outgoings, consider 'downshifting', review what values motivate you and trust that things will eventually get better.

As long as we have food, everything else is negotiable if we change our mindset.

 Marion Dunlop is a Carlisle-based life coach and therapist www.cumbriatherapies.com