



# Fitness in the fresh air

**H**ello everyone and welcome to Fitness Matters. I hope my articles are inspiring you to get fit and active. In previous issues, I've examined the many physiological benefits of regular, structured exercise programmes for peri and postmenopausal women. However, exercise has many psychological benefits, which are often overlooked in our quest for the body beautiful.

It is well reported that many women undergoing menopause transition experience a range of psychological problems including depression and anxiety, low self-esteem, negative body image and mood disorders, in varying degrees of severity.

While hormonal flux is implicated, it is certainly not the only causal factor. Interestingly and of particular relevance here are the effects of physical inactivity on psychological well-



**Fitness expert Kathleen Stewart goes for a walk and suggests some simple exercises to make it more worthwhile**

being. Some research studies have revealed an association between regular exercise and positive mood scores that has been assessed by psychological questionnaires. These beneficial effects of aerobic exercise on mild to moderate depression have also been shown. Conversely, physically inactive women have reported decreased psychological well-being around the time of menopause.

Stress is another major issue for many of us undergoing

menopausal transition. In addition to the internal hormonal upheavals we are experiencing, external stressors can take their toll on our mental health. Juggling the demands of work and family while feeling under the weather ourselves, perceptions of loneliness and lack of empathy and support from significant others all have negative effects. Add disturbed sleep patterns into the mix and the effects can be devastating.

While exercise classes and the gym may be popular, out-

door workouts have additional benefits. Fresh air, sunshine and an ever-changing environment can lift our spirits and ease stress. Here are some ideas.

### WALKING

A seriously under-rated activity, walking is a fantastic way to boost your mood and alleviate stress. If all you can manage is a leisurely stroll, that's fine. For those who like a challenge, power walking is an option.

When power walking, ensure good posture (shoulders back and down, abdominal muscles braced, gluteals contracted). Stride forward with purpose, using arm action to increase intensity. Avoid over-striding. Just use your normal stride length and quicken your pace. Power walk for random intervals with intermittent recovery periods. You can use lamp posts or trees as markers.

Alternatively, timed work/rest intervals work well. Power walk for two minutes then recover at a slower pace for one minute. Repeat the sequence up to 10 times. As you get fitter, you can power walk for longer periods.

Always warm up for about five minutes with a normal paced walk and cool down afterwards. Build up your distance gradually to avoid overuse injury and always remember to wear comfortable, well-fitting trainers or walking shoes and "breathable" socks to minimise blisters.

### CYCLING

A leisurely or steady state cycle is favoured by many, but you can boost your cardio fitness and leg strength by choosing hilly routes or performing interval training as described.

Remember that for every hill you struggle to climb, there will

be a lovely downhill section to follow. And you'll feel great afterwards.

### 3D LUNGE MATRIX

This exercise sequence will tone and shape your legs and improve muscular endurance, helping you walk and cycle more efficiently. Having strong muscles also contribute to the stability and health of the load-bearing joints in your lower limbs.

You can do this after your walk, or incorporate it into an interval training session. For example, power walk for two minutes. Stop and perform the first lunge, 16 times, on each leg. Repeat the power walk, substituting the second lunge, then the third until the entire sequence is completed.

Alternatively, perform each lunge 16 times on each leg, resting for about 30 seconds between exercises. For variety,

change the exercise order or alternate between legs when performing each lunge. Warm up with a brisk walk first.

(NOT SHOWN). Take a big step forward, bending both knees. Ensure your front knee does not extend beyond your toes. Push off foot and return to start.

**1** Take a large step out to the front corners as shown (ten to two position on the clock).

**2** Lunge out directly to the side as shown. Your outside knee is bent, inside knee straight. Return to start.

**3** Lunge out to back corners as shown and return to start. Front knee is straight, back knee is bent. Feet are in twenty-five to five position on the clock.

**4** Take a big step directly back, bending both knees. Again ensure your front knee does not overlie your toes. Drop back knee as low as possible. Return to start.

I hope you enjoy experimenting with these exercise ideas and find them beneficial for mind, body and spirit. Aim to make exercise a regular part of your life and remember you don't need to push yourself hard every time. Some days, less is more!

If you have any questions about menopause, fitness and exercise, e-mail me on [kathleen@katsfitness.co.uk](mailto:kathleen@katsfitness.co.uk) or visit my website [www.katsfitness.co.uk](http://www.katsfitness.co.uk)

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**Fitball focus**