

Light exercise can provide many health benefits to seniors

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By

Lois Heady is a gold medal-winning athlete.

Heady, 83 and a resident at the Village of Spring Meadows senior living facility, won her gold medal at the Village Victory Cup, a Senior Olympics-style competition operated by the Presbyterian Villages of Michigan Foundation.

Heady came in first in her age group in walking, where she was pitted against other residents who lined up and raced each other to the end of one of the Village's parking lots.

"I walk quite a bit anyway because I love it," Heady said.

Recommended exercises

- Aerobic exercise promotes heart health and lowers the risk of diabetes. Nyoshini Govender, a physical therapist and manager of rehabilitation services at Allegiance Health, said 30 minutes of walking three days a week is best.
- Resistance exercise can help build muscle and overall strength. Govender recommends weight training two or three times a week.
- Flexibility exercises increase



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Lois Heady, 83, of Jackson wears a gold medal she recently won for coming in first for walking in her age group during a state-wide "senior olympics" competition. "I walk quite a bit anyway because I love it," she said.

The Spring Meadows team, dubbed the Bizzy Bees, competed virtually by recording their scores for events such as the bean bag toss and the "hoop shoot," and comparing them with results from the 24 other Villages across Michigan. The Jackson-based team won the first ever Virtual Village Victory Cup, in addition to the spirit award.

Heike Scott, an administrator at the Village of Oakland Hills, said the competition was geared toward all age groups and, like the Villages, had a "focus on Wellness."

Light exercise can provide many health benefits to seniors, including "improving heart health by lowering your blood pressure, decreasing complications because of diabetes, decreasing pain because of osteoarthritis (and) increasing weight bearing and strength," said Nyoshini Govender, a physical therapist and manager of rehabilitation services at Allegiance Health.

(what else?) flexibility.

Govender recommends regular stretching, or a yoga or tai chi program.

- Balance exercises help to prevent falls, which can injure seniors. Govender said to focus on core and lower limb strengthening.

Govender said exercise also can help seniors to prevent dangerous falls, maintain a healthy weight and to release endorphins, which “promote a feeling of well being.”

Heady, who walks every day even outside of the Village Victory Cup competition, said she feels better after she walks because it makes her feel energized and relaxed.

“If I get my heart pumping, I know I’ve had a good walk,” Heady said. “When I haven’t had my walk in a day, I can feel it. I just feel sluggish.”

Govender said walking is the best form of cardiovascular exercise, which is “incredibly important.” Govender also recommended light weight training, which “helps build muscle, boost connective tissue around the bones and restores overall strength,” gentle stretches and balance exercises.

While Heady sticks mainly to walking, she said she can see the health benefits.

“I always get good reports from my doctor,” she said. “It helps me keep in good health, even at my age.”

Heady said the Presbyterian Villages of Michigan Foundation is working toward getting more seniors involved and exercising in the future.