

Cross-training provides change of pace

I pedal approximately 10,000 miles a year and thoroughly enjoy it. I credit my cycling passion developed in mid-life with lowering my weight, blood pressure and resting heart rate. I've even found leg muscles I didn't know existed. That said, I've discovered something else – the need and benefit of cross training.

One of the best things about cycling is it provides a terrific cardiovascular workout without taking a pounding on the joints. That also is its drawback. The human body needs to experience some weight-bearing exercise. Jogging, as an example, may not be a good option as the main form of exercise as one matures but it is an excellent weight-bearing activity. I jog no more than six miles a week in the winter. In the summer, I dig ditches on my nine acres of irrigated land to strengthen the upper body.

Another benefit of cross training is to avoid boredom or burnout from always doing the same activity. One of our family's valued forms of cross training is skate skiing. My wife wears her heart-rate monitor. When she rides her bike, her heart rate ranges from 125-140 while picking up the pace. In skate skiing, her heart rate averages about 115 but increases to 140 on inclines. As a calorie watcher, she likes activities that ramp up her heart rate.



One of the positive/negative things about humans, physically and mentally, is the ability to adapt. We need to adapt in many cases but when it comes to exercise, as one does a particular activity repeatedly using the same muscles, it's hard to continue challenging those muscles at the same level. If one changes from cycling to swimming, for instance, different muscles come into play. There are more than 600 muscles in the body. For balance, we need to pay attention to all of them – at least periodically.

If one sustains an injury, cross training may be the only way to maintain a fitness base. When I broke my ankle snowboarding, I was able to ride a tandem as long as my wife put her feet down. I would leave my feet clipped in until we were done riding. If one is unable to pedal for a period, one can lift weights etc.