

Getting Started is the Hardest Part

by Liz Gibbons

When I moved to Windsor Gardens one of my intentions was to get in the habit of using the fitness center regularly. But in getting settled I kept putting it off. Then warmer weather arrived, and the outdoors beckoned. Yet I knew I needed something to push me to begin an exercise program.

Serendipitously a few weeks ago I saw an article titled *Muscle as Medicine: A Most Naturopathic Anti-Aging Medicine*. It clearly explained to me what I have been trying to figure out: Why am I shrinking so much? It said that “building lean skeletal muscle mass is the most potent anti-aging regenerative medicine available” and “also one of the most basic ways to increase vitality.”

Muscle mass loss often begins when we are in our 30s and 40s. You can lose up to 8% a decade, and after age 70 the loss may increase to 15%. Being in my mid-80s I could see how that had taken its toll on me. The name given to this condition is sarcopenia which in Greek means “poverty of flesh.” It is “both a contributor and a direct result of aging.” Aerobic exercise, such as walking, running, and biking, does not efficiently or effectively build muscle. One needs to lift heavy objects.

At about the same time I saw a list of summer classes on the bulletin board in my building. There were several exercise classes offered. I thought that might be the way to start. I decided to check them out. Two weeks ago I went to the Strength Building Class one evening and the next morning to the Low Impact Aerobics class. Following the Aerobics class, the same instructor teaches a chair exercise class. I thought that would probably be a ho-hum class, but since I was there, I decided to stay. I was surprised at how much movement we were put through by mostly sitting in a chair. So I am continuing with all three classes twice a week. All three classes use lightweight dumbbells, and I have heavier ones in my condo to use on days when I have no class.

In starting a new habit we have been told we need motivation and willpower. John Clear, author of a book on habits, disagrees. He says it is inspiration that starts us and then once started, motivation takes over. You could say it is a practical application of Newton’s First Law of Motion: once things are in motion they tend to remain in motion. Understanding why building skeletal muscle is so important and desiring to be self-sufficient was the inspiration for me to start, and once I broke through my resistance I am primed to continue.

Our modern lifestyle of ease is a blessing and a curse. Pushing a button to do my laundry or carrying groceries home from the supermarket in my car do nothing for my muscles. I am grateful that Windsor Gardens fills in the gap. These are classes almost every resident would benefit from taking.