

FOCUS

Natural fitness

Get in shape without going to a gym

By JENNIFER L. SALTER

We all know that the Annex is a fabulous place to live, shop, and dine, but who knew that our neighbourhood provides everything you need for an amazing fitness routine?

From local parks and verdant, tree-canopied streets to running tracks and the shaded Casa Loma stairs, your neighbourhood's natural environment has all the facilities you need to get in shape this summer.

These days, almost everyone is aware of the benefits of regular exercise. However, 75 per cent of the general population does not work out consistently enough to reap these rewards. Exercise has been shown to be an effective way to lose body fat, prevent and treat high blood pressure, reduce cholesterol levels, manage lower back pain, increase immunity, and reduce the risk of cancer and osteoporosis.

In addition, a regular fitness routine can be highly therapeutic for those who suffer from depression and anxiety. And in 1994 the United States Surgeon General published a landmark paper stating that a lifetime of inactivity was equivalent to smoking a pack of cigarettes each day.

Despite public knowledge of how important exercise is, barriers often exist in people's lives that make it difficult for them to fit regular workouts into their schedules.

Long work hours, chronic sleep deprivation, and family demands can squelch the sincerest of intentions. But some of the busiest people are able to fit workouts into their day-to-day lives. What are the secrets of these highly motivated individuals?

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services, a convenience that would be impossible in the new location.

"I use about four and a half hours a day just to do things like use the washroom and shower," Richard said. "I already find it hard sometimes to keep on top of everything I need to do. I just don't see how I would be able to keep up the pace that I have been keeping up so far. So then we get into having to take an extra year or two to finish my PhD and that causes problems for me in terms of funding. It creates this huge snow-ball effect."

Tara Gibson is the only resident so far who has moved. While she said she would have liked to stay in the building, it did not feel secure enough at the time.

"There was distrust amongst people, because everyone thought everyone else knew information that they didn't know," Gibson said.

Because of this instability, she said her care deteriorated at that time.

Attendants would sometimes call in sick at the last minute, she said.

"I had to call my mom seven times in September for things that

They focus on enjoying exercise rather than just thinking about the results. The reality is that unless you enjoy exercise, you will not stay with it regardless of how much you know about risk factor reduction.

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They organize their time to make room for exercise. This involves committing it to your date-book or BlackBerry, giving it as much importance as a work meeting, lunch plans with a friend, or a doctor's appointment.

They set fitness-related goals and work towards them. Setting short-term goals is highly effective for staying focused on and committed to your fitness regimen.

They don't feel guilty if they skip a workout. Each day is a new beginning. They may be disappointed if they miss an exercise session or two, but will never give up on their program altogether due to a few off-days.

They remember that they feel less stressed when they exercise. They don't lose sight of the reasons why they work out—to relieve stress and anxiety, and to feel alive and in control of their lives.

While you should always consult with your physician before embarking on an exercise program, here are some ways to be active in the Annex:

Climb the Casa Loma stairs

Walk or run alone or with a partner. There are 110 stairs, so take a break at the top to catch your breath and have a drink before returning to the bottom for the next round.

Cycle up Poplar Plains Road

Then do it again. This notorious hill is both loved and hated by downtown cyclists. But with the combined benefit of a dedicated bike lane and gradual increase in elevation, this hill is a surefire way to improve your fitness level.

Run or walk laps around

Central Technical School's track

While the track has not been ideally maintained in recent times, it offers gentler asphalt than sidewalk concrete—a bonus for sore knees. As this is a standard size track and four times around equals one mile, you can keep tabs on distance easily.

Have fun at local parks.

Who says jungle gyms are just for kids? Have a workout partner help you do pull-ups on the monkey bars, use stairs for lunges and squats, or do pushups and stretches on the grass. Strengthen your muscles and support our public spaces at the same time!

As we bid farewell to winter and bask in the warmth of spring, we can thank the Annex for more than its fabulous restaurants. With an abundance of green spaces, any workout can be spiced up to enhance motivation.

Jennifer L. Salter, MSW, has owned her Annex-based personal fitness training practice for 14 years. She is an experienced personal trainer working with recreational athletes, individuals who are new to exercise, and those with special health considerations. Contact her at jlsalter@yahoo.com.



CARLOS LARA/OSLAME/MILO

Tara Gibson, seen here in front of her new home, was asked to leave her previous home along with several other disabled residents. The organization that ran the home was forced to close due to a lack of government funding.

should have been done by attendants."

MPP Rosario Marchese is one of several community leaders who have been trying to help the situation by putting pressure on the LHIN.

"We're dealing with a vulnerable group of people who shouldn't have to worry from day to day whether they are going to be there or whether they are going to be forced to move," Marchese said.

Representatives from LHIN

could not be reached for comment.

Although the aid brings hope to McGarrick, she said she is not entirely confident that they will be able to keep the services at the current location.

"There's so much talk today about housing. Given the huge wait-lists in Toronto for people with disabilities it doesn't make sense to close a place that has been working," she said.