



Here comes summer!

Are you ready?

Welcome to PhysioBiz, with healthcare advice and information you can trust and rely on, brought to you by the South African Society of Physiotherapy!

August is the month in which many of us wake up and realise that we've broken our vows to keep exercising through the winter. "It's just too cold," we wailed, morning after morning. "I'll get going again next week." But – human nature being what it is – we didn't.

Never mind. The wonderful thing about exercise is that ANY movement, at ANY time, is better than none. Frida Richards, who taught many South African ballet stars, gave movement classes in old age homes when she was already well into her seventies, and used to marvel at how simply getting elderly people in wheelchairs to use their arms in time to music "perked them up"; those tiny increases in movement, in many cases, ultimately enabled residents to regain mobility.

So get going right now, in these last days of August: don't push yourself too hard, but go for a walk, swim a few lengths, take the children for a hike, play a pick-up game of soccer with friends, add movement to daily life by climbing stairs, mopping floors or mowing the lawn.

And beware of exercise myths! We've selected three common myths for debunking:

- It's crucial to stretch before exercise.

"There's quite an extensive body of research showing that this is not true," says Professor Witness Mudzi, President of the South African Society of Physiotherapy (SASP). "Static stretching does not act as an effective warm-up; it doesn't prevent muscle soreness after exercise; and there's no evidence that it prevents injury. Just do a bit of a warm-up – even by starting your activity slowly – and you're good to go."

- You must drink stacks of liquid while exercising.

This persistent myth was put to bed by Sports Professor Timothy Noakes more than a decade ago, after he researched hydration during exercise. As he said in a 2012 commentary in the British Medical Journal, “Over the past 40 years humans have been misled [...] to believe that they need to drink to stay ‘ahead of thirst’ to be optimally hydrated.” The results could be tragic – a 28-year-old woman runner died of over-hydration (what doctors call hyponatraemia) after the 2002 Boston Marathon. (Meanwhile, deaths from dehydration during exercise are exceedingly rare.) So drink when you’re thirsty, and no more.

- Sex is bad for performance in sports or athletics.

All those old coaches were wrong – even Rocky Balboa’s trainer telling the Sylvester Stallone character, “Women weaken legs”. Uh-uh. A 2016 systematic review of research in the field tells us that, while factors that may sometimes occur along with sex (drinking alcohol, for instance) could affect performance, it’s unlikely that sex does, not the night before, anyway, as the review’s authors conclude: “...most studies generally seem to exclude a direct impact of sexual activity on athletic aerobic and strength performance. The most important aspect seems to be the interval from the time of the sports competition that affects negatively the performance if it is shorter than 2 h. [...] The present evidence suggests that sexual activity the day before competition does not exert any negative impact on performance, even though high-quality, randomized controlled studies are urgently needed.”

“Relax and enjoy your exercise without anxiety,” says Professor Mudzi. If you have any concerns – such as a niggling injury, or worry about exercising post-operatively – consult your physiotherapist, who can provide the best practical advice.

To find a physiotherapist near you, go to www.saphysio.co.za