

Thinking outside the **t**



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By Christina Quick

climbing

hiking

mountain biking

skiing

skating

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Five fun-filled adventures in exercise

You know you need to exercise. But if running on a gym treadmill doesn't sound like your idea of a good time, don't sweat it. There are plenty of ways to get physically fit — and love every minute of it.

Dr. Allan Goldfarb of the American College of Sports Medicine says the key to maintaining an exercise routine is finding activities you enjoy. "There are plenty of fit people who don't adhere to gym schedules," says Goldfarb. "Everybody has their own area of interest. Any physical activity can be beneficial."

The following activities are not only great for you, they're also great fun. Get the whole family in on the act, and make some amazing memories in the process.

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Rock climbing

It's hard to beat the sense of accomplishment that comes from conquering 60 feet of vertical stone. Though it sounds dangerous, rock climbing with the right equipment and instruction can be as safe as any other sport.

Scaling rock or artificial climbing walls is a full-body workout, building muscle, increasing flexibility, and potentially burning between 700 and 800 calories per hour. At the same time, climbing challenges and stimulates the mind.

"Climbing is a varied and interesting workout," says Calvin Landrus,

an avid climber and director of a Christian climbing organization called Solid Rock Climbers for Christ. "You have to use your mind and body together as you think through the moves."

Before getting your feet too far off the ground, find a knowledgeable instructor or partner who can teach you the basics of climbing and rope management. Most indoor climbing gyms and many universities offer classes for beginners.

When you're ready to invest in the sport, plan to spend at least \$350 for a basic set of equipment, which includes a harness, chalk bag, climbing rope, rock shoes and helmet.

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Hiking

The American Hiking Society's Web site lists a variety of health benefits associated with hiking, including weight loss, prevention of heart disease and osteoporosis, lower blood pressure, less arthritis pain, and improved mental health.

"Each time you go outside and walk, as long as you stay within your capabilities, you will come home feeling better than you did when you left," the Web site says. "Your

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body will feel better. Your head will feel clearer, and your stress level will have decreased. The result? You'll want to hike again!"

Hiking could mean a half-hour workout on a wide, lakeside path or a weekend backpacking trip through mountains. Many parks have walking paths and trails of varying lengths and degrees of technical difficulty.

When venturing into the wilderness, seek the advice of local rangers or experienced hikers. Take a map

and compass and stay on well-marked trails to avoid getting lost. Wear sturdy, comfortable shoes and take sufficient amounts of water and food, including a little extra in case your hike takes longer than expected. And always let someone know where you're going and what time you plan to return.

Mountain biking

Mountain biking has caught on quickly since its introduction in Colorado and California in the 1970s.

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Today, thousands of people across the country participate in the sport, which involves riding a specialized bicycle on off-road trails.

Mountain biking has all the benefits of regular cycling, with the added bonus of venturing off the beaten path and into some beautiful, remote locations.

Libby Ward, promotions and editorial coordinator for Assemblies of God U.S. Missions, describes mountain biking as an intense physical and mental workout.

“You have to learn to trust yourself and the bike you’re on, especially when going downhill,” says Ward, who also climbs and competes in outdoor adventure races.

Mountain bikes are sturdier, have wider tires, and are usually equipped with more shock absorption than standard bicycles. They can range in price from \$200 to \$2,000 or more. In addition to a bike, you’ll also need a helmet. And until you’re comfortable bouncing around in the woods, you may want to consider elbow and knee pads.

Kayaking

If you live near water, you already have half the ingredients for kayaking. Find a business that rents the popular boats, and you’re practically ready to go.

When done correctly, paddling a kayak works your upper torso as well as your abdominal muscles. Best of all, kayaking is an adventure sport that’s relatively easy to learn.

“I’ve put people from 8 to 80 in a boat,” says Bill Keogh, owner of Big Pine Kayak Adventures in Florida. “If you’ve been in a canoe even once you’ll feel comfortable in a kayak. A kayak is actually easier than a canoe because of its grace, speed and maneuverability.”

Many businesses that rent canoes also offer kayaks. If you decide to purchase your own kayak, plan to spend at least \$600, Keogh says.

As with any boating activity, be sure to wear a lifejacket.

Inline skating

Skating isn’t what it used to be. No longer reserved for teens at the roller

rink, inline skating is a fun and challenging outdoor workout of choice for people of all ages.

According to the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, there were 17.3 million inline skaters in the U.S. in 2004.

Allan Wright, owner and president of Zephyr Inline Skate Tours, says he has taught people as old as 81 to skate.

“Inline skating is a fantastic activity,” Wright says. “It burns calories, raises heart rates, and works the major muscle groups in the legs and hips. It’s also relatively low-impact, unlike running, which can jolt knees and joints.”

Wright recommends skating lessons for beginners. He says participants should also plan to spend at least \$130 for a good pair of skates. Cheaper models are often uncomfortable and may not roll smoothly. Other necessities are a helmet, wrist guards, and elbow and knee pads. ■

Christina Quick, an avid rock climber, is staff writer for Today’s Pentecostal Evangel.

E-mail your comments to pe@ag.org.