

30,000 reasons why you must start taking regular exercise

Obesity will shorten your life and costs the NHS £1 billion a year

By Carol Westmorland



IF IT involves a challenge, is pink and is for the good of others, then my elbows will be out to be at the front of the queue.

So when my sister Gilly told me that she had entered us both for the *Race for Life* I didn't need any persuading. Being prepared is my middle name but it has been said (by my husband) that I run like a cyclist, whatever that means.

Put kindly, I think he means that my stride is somewhat short which as far as I am concerned goes with my legs. Those legs have held me in good stead so far so I am not going to gripe about their lack of inches.

There are many similarities between running and cycling. Some people run and look as though every step may be their last. There are those who cycle and make each peddle stroke look excruciating. For me it's got to be smooth.

I am convinced that when you lose the look of ease, your mind loses the will. Marathon champion Paula Radcliffe is one exception. Technique is crucial. Working on cadence when you are cycling and foot stroke when you run gives focus and strength.

A startling statistic says that three in four of us are unhappy with our body shape but only one in three bothers to do enough to change. A quarter of Britons even admit to putting no time aside for proper exercise.

These worrying findings come



Happy family: Carol Westmorland, right, and sister Gill. 'My plan is to add an extra mile every fortnight,' says Carol

as Britain is gripped by a soaring fatness epidemic with almost a quarter of adults now classed as obese. In England alone, more than 30,000 deaths a year are caused by obesity while health problems linked to being overweight cost the NHS £1 billion

a year. Government guidelines recommend 30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise five times per week and 45 to 60 minutes to fight obesity.

Our health should be a priority and with good time management other aspects of life can fit around

it. First thing in the morning is available to most of us. Those who work shifts have even more flexibility. A gulp of fresh morning air leaves even the most sluggish person feeling energised and fantastic.

And you are left with a sense of achievement. Those 'feel good' chemicals we release when we exercise get to work so quickly.

Anyway, back to where this all began. I always have a pair of running shoes kicking about. It is worth making sure you get shoes that are designed to fit you correctly. You must look after your most valuable asset and show those feet of yours some tender loving care to help prevent lost days with painful blisters.

Feeling incredibly disloyal to my bike (I did give it a pat and explain that this is for a very good cause) I'm off.

UNLIKE cycling, running is without too many surprises. At cycling speed, you need to have your antennas on full alert at all times. Running is not the same.

Quiet country lanes are heavenly when all you want to do is let your mind wander. So far my only incident involves a rather startled bird being woken from its slumber and dislodging a large twig which left me with a grazed nose.

Whereas cycling offers an escape, which I love, running is much cosier. My perception of miles on the bike is such a contrast to reality. To allow me to cycle hundreds of miles I have to put it into an achievable context.

When I do my 12 hours I

average more than 240 miles. I visualise a 100-mile trip out and back and then the last 45 as the home straight and in my mind that seems easily achievable. It has therefore amazed me that five miles is so far when you are running.

I started my first couple of weeks with a five-mile circuit from home that took me along peaceful country lanes. My plan is to add an extra mile every fortnight and quicken up. My competitive nature means I often ask runners I teach how long they take to cover a mile, mentally noting how I compare.

Gilly is receiving regular updates from me on my progress. She may well regret involving me but I am hoping she has become motivated too. As a staff nurse on Oncology she is more aware than most of the importance of exercise.

Challenges – they are what we all need. Pick one every few months and tell everyone about your plans and you will reach your goal. Feeling good is infectious and that really is something worthwhile.

■ Carol Westmorland is a champion cyclist who tries to ride every day for at least two hours.

She holds the 2004 National 12-hour Championship with 243.19 miles and the 2006 National 24-hour Championship with 445.41 miles. Her personal best for 10 miles is 23 minutes 18 seconds. Her best racing terrain is hilly.

■ Carol is also a qualified Pilates instructor who holds classes throughout the week. Further information from www.pilates-cumbria.co.uk

Canoeing is great - but watch out for the capsized drill

AFTER interviewing Ray Petrie of the Carlisle Canoe Club for Active Cumbria at the end of last year, I felt inspired to join the group and 'unlearn' some of the bad habits I've picked up over the last few years of occasional, unschooled paddling.

I've been along to three coaching sessions so far – and only been in the water once! I now know my forward stroke from my 'sweep', and I'm slowly getting to grips with the 'brace'.

I also know all about what happens if you get yourself wrapped around a bridge pier or get caught in a 'double-stopper'. Wait for someone to rescue you in

Guidebook writer VIVIENNE CROW shares her love of the great outdoors



the case of the former; and, if I understood rightly, wait for a miracle in the latter.

Ray's keen to tell us horror stories as we raft up between exercises. I won't go into the unpleasant details of how he picked up a nasty stomach bug after kayaking on the lower Tees. Let's just say that not all of the small brown things floating downstream were members of the riverbank wildlife.

I thought I'd done pretty well by the end of my first session; although I wasn't turning the kayak correctly, I'd learned some new strokes and I'd even negotiated the rapids near the Sands Centre. (I know they don't look like much when you're standing on Eden Bridges, but they're a lot more frightening when you're floating on the water in a flimsy bit of plastic and you've got Ray's stories replaying in your head.)

With just a few minutes of the session to go, I made for the riverbank.

"Where are you off to?" shouted Ray.

I indicated the Sands Centre.

"No you don't. You haven't done the capsized drill."

The capsized drill? I don't remember anyone mentioning that before.

Although I love messing about on the water, I'm a scaredy-cat when it comes to putting my head under. I learned to swim at the tender age of 25, so my confidence levels aren't as high as people who learned when they were kids.

Ray talked me through the drill. "Look Ray, I'm terrified of going under. I'll give this bit a miss if that's okay."

It wasn't okay. So I asked him to give me some warning before tipping the kayak.

"You tip yourself," he said.

"So, not only do you want me to hang upside down in the water, but you want me to inflict that on myself?" It seemed unnecessarily cruel.

Anyway, I eventually tipped the kayak. I didn't allow the boat to turn completely... and I didn't tap on the bottom of it like I was supposed to... and I got one leg stuck in my panic to free myself, but at least I'd given it a go.

I've gone over it several times in my head since then and I'm sure I can get it right next time...

■ Vivienne Crow is a freelance writer specialising in outdoor pursuits.