

We're getting older so invest in mobility

By Carol Westmorland
champion cyclist and pilates instructor



As a teenager I developed Freiberg's Disease or Osteochondritis of the bone tissue in the second toe of my left foot.

To this day I have limited feeling in that toe and it is no doubt a reason for my lifelong dislike of feet. That aside and apart from not being able to get along particularly well with high heels I have otherwise not allowed it to get in my way.

I do recall it being extremely painful and frustratingly difficult for me, at the time, to walk properly. I was lucky enough to share a well-known football doctor who was swift in his diagnosis eventual surgery that was the remedy.

The condition can be triggered by a trauma and although I was reluctant to consider the culprit a 50-mile school challenge I completed, without so much as a blister, I can't recall any other likely cause. The point is that having endured a form of arthritis I am empathetic towards any fellow sufferers. I also know from my own experience how important it is to keep moving.

Getting the most out of ourselves naturally involves continued drive. I have gone on to be an enthusiastic advocate of all things active and would like to believe I have looked after myself very well. I can recall being introduced to the 'gym' at the Sands Centre when it was hidden



Keep on moving: Carol Westmorland, right, with sister Gill Elgey running on the Pennines

up in the eaves. I spent my 20s jumping high to the loud beats of the 1990s in a dance studio and thereafter the cycling took its hold.

For everyone who suffers from or is in the firing line of risk, through genetic probability, of bone degeneration, I say don't be overwhelmed.

It is a well documented fact that I 'found' Pilates following a hard landing from the bike. A broken elbow prompted my search for a remedy and led me to Pilates back in 1998. I have been a Pilates devotee now for over 10 years and still feel new to the whole discipline.

I find through my teaching a

balance. I am reminded every day how important it is and recognise no two days are the same.

Before I began Pilates I would have classed myself as extremely fit and assumed therefore that I was strong too. I can still vividly remember the surprise in finding that actually I couldn't quite use my body as I expected. My motor skills (co-ordination) were fine from years of dance but I found using a wider range of muscles altogether different.

Cycling might be one of the best ways of improving your cardiovascular health, but a recent study has confirmed that if the only exercise you do is road

cycling, you might well be putting yourself at risk of osteoporosis. The reason for this is the lack of weight bearing involved.

Osteoporosis, or porous bone, is a disease characterised by low bone mass and structural deterioration of bone tissue, over time, leading to fragility and an increased risk of fractures of the hip, spine and wrist. Cyclists are also at risk of osteopenia, a sub normal bone density increases fracture risk by up to five per cent.

The *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise* journal compared the lower spine bone densities of a group of

competitive male cyclists against a group of moderately active men who did other sports. The cyclists had considerably lower spinal bone densities, despite having a greater calcium intake.

In cycling, the lack of impact can lead to a lower bone density, especially in the lower back. This is because it is immobile and relatively shock free when riding on smooth roads. Off road cycling naturally includes enough knocks and bumps.

The more you weight bear during exercise, the better your circulation, and since your blood carries oxygen to help cells grow, your bones benefit just like every other part of your body.

The study recommended cutting back on salt and sugar both of which increase calcium excretion and carbonated drinks that contain phosphoric acid, which reduces calcium absorption.

Nor are alcohol, tobacco and caffeine good for us in this context – they reduce mineral absorption and stimulate adrenal glands.

Thankfully, I can't get enough dark green vegetables in my diet so I am heartened to learn that the experts recommend that we eat lots of them.

They also recommend eating plenty of berries and cherries, soy food, sesame seeds, flaxseed, beans and pulses and oily fish – all of which are rich in nutrients that will support healthy bone growth.

As a nation we are getting older. In 2050, about 11 per cent of the population of the UK will be over 80. With a fact like that isn't it worth investing in our mobility in every way we can.

Don't get caught out on the fells - or on a busy Lakes road - without a torch

WHAT have you got in the bottom of your ruck-sack when you go out walking? A smelly old pair of socks? A half-eaten Mars bar? The mouldy remains of last weekend's sandwiches?

The Langdale and Ambleside Mountain Rescue Team volunteers set up a checkpoint in the Lake District at the end of last month to check that walkers were carrying all the equipment they would need for a day on the fells.

They were particularly concerned that, having put the clocks back one hour, walkers would be caught out.

The rescuers know from experience that, as soon as British Summer Time ends, the number of callouts will increase – simply because people have forgotten to take a torch with them.

Guidebook writer
Vivienne Crow shares
her love of the great
outdoors



It's a simple bit of kit, reasonably lightweight and people don't require any training to use it.

Even the most experienced walkers can get caught out by failing light. You may plan your day out on the fells with military precision and 'know' that you will be back at your car by 15.44 precisely, but what happens if the fog descends and you take a wrong turning and have to backtrack? Or you come across an accident?

Needless to say, I learned about the need to carry a torch the hard

way – as a naive and ill-equipped 21-year-old hill novice.

In fact, it was my first walking trip to the Lake District.

Our planned route on the low fells above Windermere didn't seem overly adventurous and we set off at a reasonable time, but we got hopelessly lost somewhere in Kentmere. After going round in circles for what seemed like hours, we finally reached the A591 near Ings at about 3.30pm.

Not a problem in the summer, but if I tell you that my birthday falls just before the shortest day of the year in December, you'll understand how little daylight we had.

Not only was the sun setting, but it was hammering it down with rain – far from ideal conditions for walking two miles

along a busy A-road; and made even more difficult by the fact that neither of us had torches.

Not only could we not see the road, but the drivers coming towards us with their wipers swishing away frantically had no idea we were there until they almost hit us. It was a terrifying experience for us and, if the number of car horns we heard is anything to go by, the motorists didn't enjoy the experience either.

Incidentally, other lessons were learned on that first cold, wet trip to Cumbria too – cheap anoraks, for instance, are not a substitute for good waterproofs and will not stop you from shivering uncontrollably as you battle your way against cold, driving rain and angry motorists in the middle of December.

