

Golden Years

September 2020



Fitness in the fall

HOW TO SAFELY EXERCISE DURING COVID-19

By Donna Christopher

The area's YMCAs — there is one located in virtually every town, including Darien, New Canaan, Westport/Weston, Greenwich, Wilton (Riverbrook), Stamford, the Regional Y of Western CT in Brookfield, and several Central Connecticut Coast YMCAs in Fairfield, Bridgeport, Stratford, Trumbull and Milford — are open with safely limited access to fitness centers, pools, and limited group exercise classes, along with personal training options and a growing menu of virtual fitness programs geared to active older adults.

If you're a senior looking for innovative ways to keep in shape at home, See **Fitness** on Page 4



Many of the local YMCAs offer small classes to provide for social distancing during exercise. Here, a member of the Westport YMCA participates in an MX4 Active Class, which is geared towards improving balance, coordination, and strength. At top, a couple takes advantage of the beautiful fall weather—and foliage—to exercise.



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Fitness

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you might consider one or more of the specialized online classes that are offered and which feature virtually every workout genre, from yoga to tai chi to strength training, and much more. They cover all training levels as well and include Rise and Shine for Older Adults and Resistance for Older Adults at the YMCAs in Brookfield, Westport and Darien.

Whether a senior works out virtually or in-person, the benefits of exercise include improved cardiovascular and muscle strength, flexibility, and balance, health practitioners say. Of course, being able to work out online has the added bonus of not having to drive anywhere and exercising in the comfort of any setting you find appealing, whether it is your cozy living room or your peaceful backyard.

If you miss the socialization of working out in the presence of others, many of the YMCAs are open with limited capacity to members either on a first-come, first-served basis or by reservation to ensure your space will be available with ample social distancing.

Some locations offer spin classes indoors and outdoors, weather permitting. Aqua fitness classes have been added back in and adjusted to give plenty of space around each participant. Locker rooms are open with some lockers remaining closed to space members apart from one another. To find the YMCA closest to you, visit ymca.net/find-your-y.

The New Canaan YMCA lineup of virtual classes is varied and includes Chair Fitness, Chair Yoga, and Chair Pilates, each a 60-minute class livestreamed Monday to Friday. Members here can use the fitness center and pool, and sign up for a Modified Group Exercise class being held in the gym, all by reservation. There are aquatic fitness classes and personal training options available.

“We’re all going through a little bit of depression and social isolation. Exercise in general makes you feel better. It releases endorphins and improves sour mood. If you join a virtual class, while you don’t socialize as you would at a regular class, you do talk to one another after the class, so you get some interaction,” said Kristin Schnitzler, group wellness director and registered dietician.

Some of the virtual options, such as Chair Pilates, are great choices to work your core with the support of a chair, she explained. All chair fitness classes are beneficial like any exercise, according to Schnitzler. They improve cardio, core, balance, and strength



while seated in an upright chair. “You get the general benefits of exercise but you have the support of the chair so if you have problems standing or sitting and standing, the chair gives you support to make the exercise safer,” she said.

“If seniors want to come into the Y, we offer aqua fitness classes. These are suitable for their age group. Our active older adults feel comfortable with our procedures in place to the whole prevention of COVID-19,” Schnitzler added.

The Darien YMCA offers both virtual classes and on-site classes and access to the facility, also by reservation is open every day. Classes have safely resumed and swim and aqua fitness classes, outdoor personal training, and ongoing virtual classes for members are in place.

Virtual offerings for seniors include Lite & Easy, Land-Based “water exercise,” and Restorative Yoga. In-person options are outdoor yoga, water exercise, personal training outdoors, and virtually open swim reservations for the larger and smaller pools.

Jess Van Sciver, health and fitness director, said along with transitioning some of the classes from in-person to virtual, the Y is adhering to “strict guidelines that keep our members safe. Some of these changes include: Each member and staff being surveyed at the front before entering the building, mask required in all areas of the building, 6-foot distance throughout the building, 12-foot

distance for in-person classes in our gym as well as with our cardio equipment, hand sanitizing stations, disinfecting wipe stations, staff, and our maintenance team constantly disinfecting surface areas and more.”

The virtual classes are new to the Darien YMCA and are “doing great,” according to Van Sciver: “We see this continuing in the future. When we were shut down from mid-March to June 17, we had over 500 seniors participate in our virtual offerings each week.”

Greenwich YMCA launched a “Y @ Home” resource center that featured an @ Home Workouts section with various classes for all abilities, including “Adaptive Fitness” for varying fitness abilities, explained Lauren C. Valbiro, marketing and communications manager. Classes include Rock Steady Boxing and Mighty MSers.

“These classes are live streamed and do not require any extra equipment; they are a great way for our members to continue to maintain all of the progress they made with us prior to our closure. In general, we have an ever-growing Parkinson’s Body & Mind Program geared towards members of our community with Parkinson’s disease. Prior to the COVID-19 shutdown, we were seeing great success with this program and hope to continue to grow our offerings as the climate of the community’s health shifts,” said Valbiro.

There are in-person wellness classes that would appeal to seniors including yoga, Pilates, and Aquafit. “We are not currently



Swimming is a wonderful way to exercise. At left, a member of the Darien YMCA takes part in the organization’s Aqua Fit 5 class. Above, a member of the Regional YMCA wears a mask during his visit to the center’s weight room, where equipment is positioned to keep participants distanced.

hosting in-person Parkinson’s-specific classes. It is my understanding; however, we are working on expanding our schedule to include more virtual programs from our instructors for our Parkinson’s community.”

John P. Dunleavy, MD, FAAOS, an orthopedic surgeon for OrthoConnecticut, Danbury, treats many senior patients who are looking to stay active. “The first thing I say to patients is whatever you can do to stay active you should do, even if it’s only taking a little walk,” he said. “There’s no such thing as doing too little. If all they can do is walk around their neighborhood, that works. A lot of times walking on flat ground is much easier, so sometimes folks will go to the mall or the local high school track to avoid hills.”

Activities that keep the joints moving without applying too much pressure are ideal, such as walking and swimming, Dunleavy continued. Taking an aquatic fitness class is a good option, he said, as “the water workouts reduce gravity’s effects and are easier on the joints.”

Dunleavy recommended working out with a friend as part of a routine to help you stick with the exercises. “In a gym, elliptical equipment and stationary bikes allow for low-impact aerobic exercise, among other examples,” he added.

“Yoga is also a good workout,” Dunleavy said. “Wear and tear of our joints is a normal part of aging. Not everyone is affected in the same way or as severely. But low-impact exercises tend to benefit patients with all degrees of arthritis.”

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