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With the approach of shorter days and colder weather, I've been contemplating how I will achieve my exercise goals this winter. I have to resist the urge to store food and hibernate through winter, and rather, come up with an exercise plan that I can stick with. After all, the benefits of exercise are many. Exercise is recommended to decrease blood pressure, weight and cholesterol, build muscle and bone, increase brain function, and to decrease the risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. Mental health experts have long recommended exercise as therapy to combat depression and decrease anxiety. In addition there are anti-aging benefits. Many studies confirm that regular exercise can halt and possibly reverse the loss of strength, flexibility and balance, even in those over the age of fifty. The need to exercise cannot be ignored.

Two quotes spur me on when I'd rather be sitting in a comfortable chair with a good book than to be exercising: "Energy begets energy" and "What you don't use, you lose". I've forgotten now where I heard them initially, but they're both very true. Once I get going, I always feel more energized, for example, after a walk or bike ride, and my strength and flexibility seem to evaporate after a mere week of inactivity.

Decide now how to keep *your* energy and fitness up this winter. Mall walking indoors is an option for those who are fairly mobile and have transportation. Utilizing the local YMCA or gym is another. Most offer senior discounts. If the cost is prohibitive, participate in an adult education, or COA (Council On Aging) sponsored exercise class or activity. The COAs often provide transportation, and the opportunity for socialization would be a bonus. If you are homebound, consider an exercise bike or videos. I have purchased an exercise video that directs me to walk to lively music. Videos are available for all levels of ability and interest. I use them when I don't feel like making the trip to the gym and would rather exercise in the privacy and comfort of my home. Disease and disability are often limiting factors. Exercise to the degree you are able, and under the direction and advice of your doctor.

Start easy if you've been sedentary, but get going. Concentrate on the benefits and positive results. Set small goals. Gains may be slow, but will eventually be noticeable. Take care!