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Bringing boomers into the fitness fold

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Elaine Gorrior, 55, an office worker in Yellowknife, was looking around for an exercise option when she saw a TV commercial for an unusual piece of equipment. Called the Resistance Chair, it fit into a small place and allowed the user to exercise while sitting.

When she began to use it, she said, she could barely do five minutes because of a serious heart problem. Within less than a year however, she had incrementally increased her time to half an hour, had lost 40 pounds and significantly strengthened her heart.

"My doctors," she said, "have commented that they haven't ever seen a recovery like mine and were just amazed."

Ms. Gorrior got her Resistance Chair from Gwen Rose, founder of Toronto-based Wheels of Fitness, a company that specializes in bringing the health benefits of exercise to that influential demographic that began to hit 65 this year, the baby boomers.

A physiotherapist with 30 years of experience, Ms. Rose has been sourcing and marketing equipment that, as she put it, "can help with the health, fitness and rehabilitation of aging people, to give them alternatives."

People in the 45-to-60 age range, she said, need to approach fitness differently than when they were younger. They should make sure to do warm-up exercises and add resistance training to their regimes to strengthen bones and help prevent osteoporosis. She's a big fan of using urban poles during walks. Resembling ski poles, "they help give support to the joints, take stress off the knee joints, off the back, plus you're burning 10 to 20 per cent more calories," Ms. Rose said. "Plus you're working your core muscles."

While exercise is more beneficial than ever for baby boomers, studies show that "less than 50 per cent of 40-to-60-year-olds exercise enough," she said, stressing the importance of getting started on a doable fitness routine.

"That generation didn't grow up with exercise," she added. "They grew up with active lifestyles." But they may find that the leisure imposed by retirement can make them feel lethargic and worsen potential [health problems](#).

Working boomers, meanwhile, often find they just don't have the time to squeeze in an hour at the gym or a morning run. They are also increasingly dealing with stress, facing professional and time demands from which a wired world never seems to provide a break.

"We're the sandwich generation," said Ms. Rose, "so we have our parents and our children to worry about. With the economic downturn we have financial worries, like will we have enough money to retire?"

"So exercise is preventative," she added, "because with stress you can get chronic illnesses. Plus, by strengthening the muscles, it helps prevent injuries."

A year ago, she decided to go beyond health coaching and take on [stress management](#). Her new business, the Rose Remedy Program, offers a range of services from biofeedback to yoga for stressed-out boomers.

For Mary Greco of Bradford, Ont., family issues were stressing her to the point where she couldn't sleep at night. At the age of 53, she said, "I couldn't take care of myself because I had to take care of everyone else around me."

While her upbringing had taught her not to question roles, she added, "I think anyone who's at the age of 50 and has done raising their kids, should be at a stage where you should be looking after 'me.'"

Using Skype, Ms. Greco received one-on-one therapy from one of Ms. Rose's team, certified health coach Vanessa Petronelli. She began to meditate and do breathing exercises. "Because of the training I did with Vanessa and Gwen, it helped me move forward," she said. By the time of her final session, she said, she understood herself and her situation more clearly, and was able to walk away from the dilemma that was bothering her.

Whether the source of the problem is physical or emotional, all of her clients, said Ms. Rose, want to both "look better and feel better. They want to have the energy and the stamina. They don't want to have the illnesses and problems they see their parents and other people having. It's not just about living longer," she added, "but living better and healthier."

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