



A cool way to keep fit

Winter is no excuse to stop exercising and letting the kilos pile on, writes **Erica Watson**

IT IS dark, it is cold and hitting the snooze button on a chilly winter's morning can be so much more tempting than getting up to go for a run in the rain.

Unfortunately, winter can often be a time when exercise takes a back seat to warmth and comfort. We fall into the trap of settling in with a bowl of popcorn and stack of DVDs rather than sweating it out at a fitness session.

And while we might think the couch and a heater creates an excellent sanctuary to escape dreary weather, experts remain adamant that it is important to remain active regardless of the outside temperature.

Exercise physiologist David Driscoll says winter is certainly no excuse to sit around on your backside.

“Just because it’s cold outside doesn’t mean you hibernate,” he says.

In fact, he says the cooler months can be the perfect opportunity to try out new activities. Joining a local community club that offers indoor sports such as soccer, netball, dance lessons or squash is a great alternative to the gym.

Equipment such as dumb bells, swiss balls and skipping ropes are also relatively cheap and a good way to exercise in the comfort of your own home. Exercise DVDs are also a great way to burn calories indoors.

And if budget permits, treadmills, exercise bikes or cross trainers can also easily be used in the home. And never underestimate the significance of incidental exercise.

Skipping the lift at work and taking the stairs can burn calories and make a huge difference to fitness levels.

Australian fitness professional of the year, personal trainer James Short, says it doesn’t matter what type of exercise people choose as long as they stick to it. Choosing something that’s enjoyable will also yield better results.

“As long as you maintain a consistency

you will get through winter without a problem,” he says.

“If you find that it’s a chore to get up then you need to choose something different.”

While motivation can often be difficult to muster in the cooler weather, switching morning exercise sessions to the evening can help — especially for those who aren’t early risers, particularly in the cold. Accountability is also key. Short suggests recruiting a group of buddies and exercising together.

“If you are accountable to someone you are more likely to go,” Short says.

Driscoll, on the other hand, suggests a no-holds-barred approach. Bringing out the swimsuit early in the season or catching a glance of your muffin-top in the mirror will have you hot-footing to the gym, he says.

“Whatever clothes you are going to pull out in spring, get them out and chuck them on a few times,” he says.

“Look at yourself in the mirror naked a few times. Obviously you tend to cover up [in winter] and not see what’s going on until you peel it all off when the sun comes out.”

As well as exercise, diet is also an important consideration in winter, says dietitian Susie Burrell. Rather than opting for stodgy meals, try soups, stir fries, roast vegies and green tea. They are a great healthy alternative for warming the insides without a large amount of added calories and fat.

“We need to remember that it is really not all that cold in Australia and hence not an excuse to overeat,” she says.

Cooking extra also means you have ready-to-go meals if that work meeting runs late.

Keeping fit and healthy in winter also means we can be less susceptible to illness.

Another plus is that exercising in cold weather burns slightly more calories than usual. So there really is no excuse.