

HEALTH & WELL-BEING

Laurie Roles, center, goes through an exercise with Melissa Jones, left, and Lois Friese during her Monday morning functional fitness class at the Truro Community Center. Laurie suggests spending some time each day standing on one leg, then switching, like when you're washing dishes. This will help improve balance.



MERRILLY LUNSFORD/CAPE COD TIMES

FUNCTIONAL FITNESS

Accessible, adaptable, affordable

BY BARBARA RAVAGE

The large, light-filled room in Truro's new community center is humming with activity as a group of women work their way around a circuit, each spending one or two minutes per station.

There's the balance disc, a soft circular cushion with raised nubs that employs core strength to improve balance and joint stability. A cloth-and-rope ladder stretched along the floor offers a hop-skip-jump course that tests agility in a manner reminiscent of hopscotch.

One woman flips a tubeless car tire over and over across the floor, squatting with a straight back, the correct posture for lifting a heavy object from

the floor. Another throws a medicine ball behind her head, working her "lats" (latissimus dorsi), the large back muscles that play a major role in shoulder mobility and back strength and can underlie significant pain in those areas when weak. There are hand weights to hold like suitcase handles while doing lunges across the room and plastic cones set up as an obstacle course to challenge agility. There are several "core" stations, including one equipped with a soccer-size ball centered on a bar that ensures correct

Laurie's classes emphasize strength, cardiovascular endurance, flexibility and balance.

posture and positioning as you use it to twist from the abdomen rather than from the hips, knees or legs. At another, a medicine ball on a rope can be swung overhead. There's even a hula hoop. Keeping it spinning between waist and hips requires core strength ... who knew?

"Use it or lose it," or so the expression goes. But Laurie Roles believes it's possible to get it — fitness — even if you never had it, regardless of your age and physical condition.

"I start with whatever someone's ability is and then work from there," she says. Poor balance and the related

lack of core strength can be improved, she explains, and they are the main targets of functional fitness for older adults. "Functional fitness is daily-life-specific. We need balance and core strength for going up and down stairs, sitting down and getting up from a chair, reaching, lifting, bending down."

Laurie's classes emphasize strength, cardiovascular endurance, flexibility and balance. "The more conditioned you are, the less likely you are to have an injury."

Laurie's adult functional fitness class meets from 9 to 10 a.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at the Truro Community Center. (In summer, classes meet Mondays only.) "I call it

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a comprehensive full-body, full-mind workout," she says. There's no membership fee, and one need not be a Truro resident. Classes cost \$12; a \$60 six-class punch card drops it down to \$10. It's all part of her crusade to make exercise affordable, accessible and adaptable.

The "regulars" range in age but tend to be middle-aged and older. Men are welcome, but as is often the case, they're a rare sight in exercise classes. Some members are in better shape than others; some have health conditions that benefit from activity but require modification. For example, one has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, often referred to as COPD, which makes her short of breath. Others have knee problems or arthritis, which limit movement to a degree.

Laurie takes care to suggest alternatives while, at the same time, keeping the workout challenging at whatever level each person can achieve. Fit as I am, I was sweating and my heart was thumping by the end of the class I attended.

According to Laurie's website, "The beauty of circuit training is that it is adaptable to all fitness levels, with endless possibilities for variety." The circuit allows Laurie to individualize each activity. "It affords me the opportunity to fine-tune them a little bit. For them, it's like having a personal trainer for a couple of minutes."

Periodically, she'll call a halt to the circuit work for a minute or two of straight cardio, to get everyone's heart rate up. It might be as simple as a low-impact foot shuffle or more taxing jumping jacks, which really quicken the heart-beat because they involve moving both the upper and lower body. This "interval training" relies on alternating bursts of intense activity with less-intense periods. Varying intensity expends more calories because it shakes up the metabolism and increases aerobic capacity.

"Studies now show that you burn more fat doing 20 minutes with your heart rate going up and down

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between 65 and 85 percent of your maximum heart rate than a full 20 minutes at 85," Laurie explains.

Your heart rate is the number of times per minute your heart contracts. As a rule of thumb, your maximum heart rate (MHR) is 220 minus your age. During cardio training an exerciser would set a target rate between 65 and 85 percent of his or her maximum heart rate.

So, for example, if you're 70 years old, your MHR would be 150 and you should aim for between 97 and 127 beats per minute while you are working out.

You can check your heart rate by holding your index and middle fingers against the side of your neck where your pulse is easy to feel. Count beats for 15 seconds, then multiply by 4. Do not use your thumb, which has its own pulse. Or do the "talk test" recom-

mended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: "As a rule of thumb, if you're doing moderate-intensity activity you can talk, but not sing, during the activity. If you're doing vigorous-intensity activity, you will not be able to say more than a few words without pausing for a breath."

Laurie keeps the intense intervals short because, she says, "I think if I started this class with 20 minutes of cardio, a lot of people wouldn't come back. It's much easier to do multiple intervals of a minute and a half. You

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