

10 Southeast Valley activities to try in 2015

Mark Nothhaft, Special for The Republic | azcentral.com 12:21 p.m. MST December 23, 2014

Here are a few ways to shed pounds in the Southeast Valley and become healthier inside and out in the New Year.



(Photo: Cheryl Evans/The Republic)

If your New Year's resolution calls for becoming more fit and healthy, you're not alone.

"Losing weight has always been a popular resolution or goal, but 'becoming healthier' is relatively new and, in my mind, a much more appropriate goal or resolution," says Linda Vaughan, director of the School of Nutrition and Health Promotion at Arizona State University.

"By taking the emphasis off weight and focusing on the more important issue of health, there are a number of benefits," she continues, such as proper cholesterol levels, more exercise, better sleeping habits and other lifestyle patterns that "many people ignore if they are just focusing on weight."

Vaughan also recommends starting slowly and choosing activities that suit your lifestyle. Sage advice.

The good news is that we live in the perfect place to make – and stick with – our healthful New Year's resolutions. There are typical options, like joining a health club or taking the stairs versus the elevator at work, but the East Valley has become more dynamic and entertaining than those.

Here are a few ways to shed pounds and become healthier inside and out:

Join a league

Whether it's softball, volleyball, bowling, tennis or any of a host of sports, there's an adult league for you. Chandler, Gilbert, Mesa, Tempe and Scottsdale offer year-round organized leagues for all levels. And if you want to learn a new sport, they have you covered with scheduled classes. Here's an added twist: Kiwanis Tennis Center in Tempe combines an aerobics class with a tennis clinic – with pulse-pounding music – to get participants moving. Cardio Tennis remains a hit, and most municipalities offer similar variation. Get your heart pumping, make new friends and get healthy.

Search Mesa sports programming at www.mesaaz.gov/parksrec/; for Tempe, visit www.tempe.gov/recreation; for Chandler, www.chandleraz.gov/adult-sports; for Gilbert, www.gilbertaz.gov/departments/parks-and-recreation and for Scottsdale, www.scottsdaleaz.gov/sports.

Take a hike or a bike ride

The East Valley boasts amazing open spaces like Papago Park in Tempe, the nation's largest municipal park at South Mountain and Lost Dutchman State Park in Apache Junction, among others. Volunteer guides lead frequent hikes up Siphon Draw, Jacob's Crosscut Trail and Treasure Loop, past craggy peaks and through the desert, at Lost Dutchman State Park. Throughout the winter season, hikes are scheduled several days a week. South Mountain Park and Papago Park beckon hikers and mountain bikers with hundreds of miles of well-groomed trails. Tempe Bicycle Action Group, a nonprofit bicycle advocacy group, organizes weekly rides around town and in the mountain parks. MTBikeAZ.com also is another good resource for mountain-bike trail itineraries around the Southeast Valley and beyond.

Lost Dutchman State Park is located at 6109 N. Apache Trail, Apache Junction, 480 982-4485. Papago Park is at 625 N. Galvin Parkway, Phoenix, 602 495-5458. The main address for South Mountain Park is 10919 S. Central Ave, Phoenix, but the park stretches as far as 48th Street in Ahwatukee, 602 262-7393. Tempe Bicycle Action Group may be reached at www.biketempe.org.

Volunteer

Lend a hand, get some exercise, and feel better physically and emotionally. Nonprofit volunteer groups like the Tempe Community Council, Neighbors Helping Neighbors in Mesa, Tempe and Scottsdale, the Salvation Army in Tempe, Mesa and Chandler, United Food Bank in Mesa and Save the Family Foundation are a good place to start. Needs include house painting, yard cleanup, warehousing and other activities that some families and the elderly cannot do for themselves.

For more information, visit www.tempecommunitycouncil.org, www.mesaaz.gov/neighbor/nhn.aspx, www.salvationarmyusa.org, www.tempeighbors.org, www.unitedfoodbank.org or www.savethefamily.org.

Shop local

Farmers markets encourage the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables – and it's just plain fun to walk about and see what everyone is selling. Stroll among the 20 or so booths at Ahwatukee's Farmers Market from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sundays and check out the fresh, seasonal produce, herbs and flowers, local salsas, fresh meats and breads. Mesa Community Farmers Market has served the area since 1995 and is a member of the Arizona Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, which provides fresh fruits and veggies to those in need. Mesa's market is open from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Fridays. Gilbert Town Square's Twilight Market convenes 3:30-7 p.m. Wednesdays. Fresh products, fresh air and exercise – the trifecta.

Ahwatukee's Farmers Market meets in the parking lot of the Ahwatukee Swim and Tennis Club, 4700 E. Warner Road, Phoenix. Mesa Community Farmers Market gathers at 263 N. Center St. Gilbert Town Square Twilight Market is located at 1040 S. Gilbert Road.

Shop exotic

Ethnic grocers like Lee Lee's International Supermarket and Food City in Chandler emphasize fresh foods over processed and feature expansive produce and fresh meat counters. If you like bok choy (the Chinese-style cabbage), pick from five different varieties at Lee Lee's. Same goes for Food City. We can buy zucchini and yellow squash anywhere, but how about Mexican gray squash or chayote? Dinner becomes more adventuresome and healthful.

Lee Lee's is located in Dobson Park Plaza, 2025 N. Dobson Road, Chandler, 480 899-2887. Food City is at 1005 N. Arizona Ave., Chandler, 480 857-2198.

Learn to dance

Classic ballroom and waltz dance classes encourage adults of all ages to get up and move and is a good way to meet people. Mesa, Tempe, Gilbert and Chandler all offer some sort of dance classes for adults. Or choose a private dance studio like Arthur Murray Dance Studio in Mesa or Paragon Dance Center in Tempe. One advantage of private studios is that they teach a wider variety of dance styles, like salsa, swing and tango.

Visit Arthur Murray Dance Studio at 2111 S. Alma School Road, Suite 7, Mesa, 480 287-5590. Paragon Dance Center is located at 931 E. Elliot Road, Suite 101, Tempe, 480 777-8877.

Go fish

The East Valley teems with fish, according to the Arizona Game and Fish department, including municipal lakes, ponds and, of course, the Salt River in far east Mesa. AZGF's 2014 Community Fishing Handbook lists Red Mountain and Riverview Lakes in Mesa, Gilbert's Water Ranch Lake and Discovery and McQueen ponds, Desert Breeze and Veterans Oasis lakes in Chandler and Tempe's Evelyn Hallman Pond and Kiwanis and Tempe Town lakes as ideal stocked fishing holes. Bass, catfish and trout are just a few varieties caught in city waters. Tempe recently held its annual "Welcome Back the Trout" event at Town Lake, where AZGF released thousands of rainbow trout raised at the state's Page Springs Hatchery in Cornville.

Also note that adults need a state-issued fishing license and that fishing in Salt River Project canals and golf course lakes is prohibited. To view the Community Fishing Handbook and to learn more about fishing opportunities in the East Valley, visit www.azgfd.gov.

Pick your own produce

The eat and shop local movement spurs more East Valley U-pick opportunities all the time. Schnepf Farms in Queen Creek is probably the most recognized with its 300 acres of fresh, organic apples, peaches, pumpkins and leafy vegetables and its annual peach and pumpkin festivals. But other area farmers like Mother Nature's Farm in Gilbert and BB Citrus Farms in Mesa also allow the public to pick it, bag it, take it. Prices and hours vary. Eat fresh, healthful fruits and veggies – and get a workout.

Schnepf Farms is located at 24810 S. Rittenhouse Road, Queen Creek, 480 987-3100. Mother Nature's Farm is at 1663 E. Baseline Road, Gilbert, 480 892-5874. BB Citrus Farms is at 3404 N. Val Vista Dr, Mesa, 480 924-6282.

Be creative

Exercise your mind and step back in the classroom to work with clay, glass, metals, paints, wood and more. The Mesa Arts Center offers an impressive collection of courses for adults, taught by well-regarded members of the local and national art community, including popular jewelry and beading classes. Mesa and Chandler-Gilbert Community Colleges also offer Lifelong Learning and continuing education programs in the arts, with classes like Painting Workshop, Open Arts Studio, Acrylics Painting, Basic Welding and Metal Sculpture, among others.

Visit Mesa Arts Center at 1 E. Main St., 480 644-6500, www.mesaartscenter.com. Mesa Community College is at 1833 W. Southern Ave., 480 461-7000, www.mesacc.edu. Chandler-Gilbert Community College is at 2626 E. Pecos Road, Chandler, 480 732-7000, www.cgc.maricopa.edu.

Mentor a kid

The Boys and Girls Club of the East Valley is always looking for adults to extend a hand to at-risk children. More than 800 volunteers assisted more than 43,000 youngsters last year in after-school programs, organized sports, tutoring and mentoring. More than 10 East Valley locations make it convenient to serve. Volunteers submit to a background check and fingerprinting to ensure a positive experience for everyone involved. But the real winner is you. What could be more heart-healthy than helping a child?

For more information, call 480 820-3688 or visit www.clubzona.org.

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