

Playing It Safe When Wheeling Around

By Nate Dixon, D.P.T.

For most people, the vast majority of exercise should be performed on our feet – standing tall and always conscious of posture. Walking, running, and playing sports – using footwork and hand skills – all help with improving bone strength, balance, and coordination.

With that said, let's talk about some alternative exercises using wheels – such as biking and rollerblading! Both of these exercises are great for decreasing the monotony of walking and running activities and they also can be great for improving cardiovascular fitness if done at a moderate to high intensity.

In the light of Lance Armstrong and his awesome win in the Tour de France for the fourth time – biking continues to be a popular sport! Not only is biking a great cardiovascular activity, it is also a lot of fun and economical too. However, here are some things to keep in mind when deciding what kind of exercises you want to perform: 1) If you have a sit-down job or if you're retired and find yourself sitting a lot during the day, then you will want to avoid exercising in a sit down position, as in biking; and 2) If you have been diagnosed by your physician with spinal stenosis of the low back (somewhat common in the elder adult), then biking on a recumbent, stationary bike may be the best choice of exercise.

Always wear your helmet when biking! One of my fellow classmates in physical therapy school had a biking accident with a car, resulting in a head injury (thankfully she was OK!). Even though she was wearing her helmet, she failed to have the chinstrap firmly tightened which allowed her helmet to go up and expose her forehead upon collision. We all learned a valuable lesson from her accident.

Rollerblading, also called “in-line skating”, has been what I consider to be the latest exercise fad for over ten years now. ... Well, I guess that I'm going to have to accept that this dangerous activity is no longer a fad! If I ever am blessed to have a “mini me” (child) – you can be sure that he/she will not rollerblade when I am watching! (at least that is what I say now!)

One in every 150 in-line skaters visits the hospital emergency room, according to Suzanne Schlosberg in her book *Fitness for Dummies*. If you do choose in-line skating as an alternate exercise then have fun with it, but most of all stay safe by protecting yourself from injury. Wear wrist, elbow, and knee guards along with your skating helmet. Finally, I recommend that you run with your dog and try to avoid skating with him/her on a leash – there are just too many squirrels on this Island!