Article

A Day In the Life of a Sporty Senior

From dawn until dusk, Royal Oaks resident Marian Hiller is always moving. And that's exactly how she likes it.

By Matt Alderton

When they retire, many people want to take it easy. After decades of hustling and bustling, they decide to do less, not more.

Marian Hiller isn't most people. When she retired from her accounting career at age 60, she went right back to work. Not in an office, but at the YMCA near her home in La Cañada Flintridge, California, where she spent almost every day for nearly 20 years engaged in activities ranging from running to spinning, step aerobics to boot camp.

"I've been active all my life—I took dance classes when I was younger, and I've always enjoyed walking, jogging and riding bicycles—but it wasn't until I was 60 and joined the YMCA that I became what you might call an athlete," says Hiller, who moved to Royal Oaks, a HumanGood senior living community in Bradbury, California, in 2013. "I never had time before, so when I quit work and had the time, that's what I wanted to do."

Hiller is part of a new, active senior cohort that appreciates the physical, mental and social benefits of exercise, according to the National Council on Aging. The council's 2015 United States of Aging Survey found that 32 percent of seniors exercise every day, and 35 percent are interested in fitness classes tailored to their needs.

Here's an inside look into a day in Hiller's very active life.

6 a.m. – 7 a.m.: Gym Workout

Hiller typically is awake before sunrise. Five days a week, she's in the Royal Oaks gym by 6 a.m. for an hour of cardio exercise and strength training.

"The gym is right there; it's very handy," says Hiller. "First I do the cross trainer machine, then I do all the rest of the machines that are available. Then I do a floor workout with stability balls and weights." Fridays—one of two days a week that she skips the gym—Hiller starts her morning at the Altadena Golf Course instead. "I have a lot going on," she says, "but I guess that keeps me healthy."

7 a.m. – 8 a.m.: Take a Walk

When she returns from the gym, Hiller takes a walk with her husband, Bob, and Lily, their 10-pound terrier-mix rescue dog.

"She's the best friend of practically everybody here at Royal Oaks," Hiller says of Lily. "We take an hour walk in the morning, then there are three or four more 15- to 20-minute walks with the dog scattered throughout the rest of the day."

9 a.m. – 10 a.m.: Exercise Class

Next up, several days a week, she takes an hour-long exercise class. Mondays, for instance, Hiller attends a class focused on resistance bands and cardio, led by a Royal Oaks instructor. On Tuesdays, she visits the nearby Duarte Senior Center for a cardio dance class, followed by 45 minutes of water aerobics. Wednesday's class includes weights and Pilates and, on Thursdays, she does more water aerobics. In lieu of an exercise class, on Saturdays she works her muscles for an extra hour in the garden.

"I participate in more things than most people, but you can do as much or as little as you want around here," Hiller says. "They make it very easy to stay active."

10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.: Chair Volleyball

Every Monday and Friday morning, Hiller joins fellow residents for an hour-long game of chair volleyball, a fitness activity in which even less active neighbors can participate. "The game sounds hokey, but it's a lot of fun," says Hiller, whose husband also plays. "Actually, it's probably the most fun activity at Royal Oaks."

1 p.m. – 8 p.m.: Social Time

While she dedicates her mornings to exercising her body, Hiller reserves her afternoons and evenings for exercise of the mental and social variety. Mondays, for example, she visits friends in the hospital or the Royal Oaks health center from 1:30 p.m. until 3 p.m., followed by a couples group at her church from 7:15 p.m. to 8:45 p.m. once a month.

On Tuesdays, she plays bridge from 12:45 p.m. to 4 p.m., then again from 7:15 p.m. to 8:45 p.m. Wednesdays she plays Mahjong, and Fridays she joins a knitting group. "The more things you do—the more things you're involved in—the more people you meet," Hiller says. "I think it's good to know everybody; socializing is beneficial to your health."

Destination: Better Health

If it sounds like Hiller is the Energizer Bunny of Royal Oaks, that's because she is: She wears a pedometer and most days logs approximately 20,000 steps—double the 10,000 daily steps recommended by the American Heart Association.

"The most steps I've had is 28,000 one day while I was on vacation in New Zealand," says Hiller, who adds that she believes all the steps she takes—in the gym, on walks with Lily and in her other activities—have delivered her to an enviable destination: better health.

"I'm really lucky. I'm not on a walker and I don't use a cane. I still have all my parts, my brain's still OK and I can still see. So, I guess all the exercise helps. I don't do it only for health reasons, though. I just like to be active."

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